

## c h a p t e r

## F I V E

## The Textual Analysis (or Article Critique) Paper

You may be assigned a paper asking you to analyze a book or portion of a book—for example, Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* or Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. We call this method "textual" analysis because the text itself, what the author wrote, provides your data. Your paper is about the text itself, not about the text's subject matter. For example, a textual analysis of Durkheim's *Suicide* might concern his theory of suicide or his use of statistical data to study suicide, not suicide itself. Your paper is an "analysis" because you take the author's work apart to examine the different components and then put them back together. This activity is called "explication"; a textual analysis explicates, or explains, what the author's main points are and how they are connected, and offers a critique of the author's argument. An analogy would be taking a car engine apart, explaining each part and how the parts work together, and evaluating whether the car is a good buy or a lemon.

Mastering the skill of explication will help you write better papers when a textual analysis is assigned. But, perhaps as important, this skill will help you evaluate more clearly all the books and articles you encounter in your academic career.

### ARTICLE CRITIQUES

Students are often given assignments in which they are to critique a journal article or chapter rather than an entire book. The process of explicating or critiquing, which involves summarizing, analyzing, and evaluating, can be equally applied to articles (and chapters in edited books).

Critiquing is the same method your professor employs when she or he is asked to review an article submitted for publication. Before an article is published, high-quality journals send the article out for review by three specialists—or peers—in the field under study. This procedure is known as peer review, and hence journals that employ this system are designated peer-reviewed journals (see p. 79 in Chapter 4).

Moreover, article critiques are the building blocks of literature review sections of quantitative research papers (see Chapter 6) and of review articles. Review articles (such as those published in the *Annual Review of Sociology*; see p. 75 in Chapter 4) summarize, analyze, and evaluate whole bodies of literature on a topic rather than just a single article.

Thus, the valuable techniques described in this chapter can be applied not only to texts and individual journal articles but also to whole bodies of literature. Therefore, throughout this chapter, every time you come across the words "text" or "book," you could replace either with the word "article" and use the same techniques to write your article critique (or literature review).

### ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE TEXT

In textual analysis, the text is not only your data but also the source of your question. That is, your question will arise from the author's ideas and arguments presented in the text and from your analysis of them. Your question is a vehicle for conversing with the author about the thesis or argument of the work. This conversation should be conducted in an analytically critical manner, which means that to carry on your end you must raise questions about the logic of the argument, the type and credibility of the evidence, the soundness of the conclusion, and the fundamental assumptions on which the argument rests.

Your assignment may specify how you are to analyze a text, or the format may be left up to you. Here are three main areas generally addressed in a textual analysis:

#### 1. SUMMARY

What is the author saying? This is the basic question in textual analysis. It involves considering the author's main point(s). In general, most people should agree on what the author is saying. Sometimes an instructor will assign a paper asking no more than this. He or she only wants students to demonstrate that they comprehend what the author is saying. But sometimes summary is not as easy as it seems. It requires seeing the forest and not just the trees, the entire book, not just the particular facts that are presented to support an argument. For example, Durkheim's *Suicide* is not just about the relationship between religious denominations and suicide; it is also about how social structure helps explain what is commonly considered the most private of individual acts, taking one's life.

To see the whole picture of a book, study carefully any preface, introduction, or conclusion and the first and last chapters of a book. Read through and think about the table of contents. What is the point of having the chapters organized the way they are? Why do the first chapters come first? Read through the section headings of the entire book. They usually give important

clues about what the author thinks is important. They are like signposts along a highway that tell you the cities you are going through.

**How does this author deal with one important sociological concept or issue in this text?** Rather than analyzing all the ideas that the author presents, in this approach you focus in depth on one significant aspect of the text. If you are reading Talcott Parsons's book on the *Evolution of Societies*, for example, you might ask how Parsons views modern society. In that case, your questions would include: "How does Parsons define 'modern society'? Why, in light of the overall purpose of the book, does he discuss modern society? What evidence does he use to support his claims about it?"

## 2. ANALYSIS

Analysis involves going beyond what the author says. It means looking at relationships: relationships between evidence and conclusions, relationships between concepts in the text, and relationships between the concepts in the work being analyzed and other texts.

**What devices does the author use to convince the reader that he or she is correct?** One of the general skills students should learn in college is to analyze the devices that authors—all authors, not just sociologists or academic writers—use to convince a reader. All of these have their place in writing, but all can be misused. The key here is to learn to identify what an author is doing to persuade the reader to his or her conclusions.

**Logical reasoning.** The most common form of logical reasoning is the syllogism (an *if . . . then* statement). Here the author seeks to convince you that there is a logical connection between something you already believe and something he or she wants you to believe. For example, Durkheim essentially argues that if social groups have an effect on whether a person feels a moral wholeness and if moral wholeness influences whether a person might commit suicide, then there must be a relationship between social groups and suicide. Logical reasoning can also take the form of an analogy, in which something the author wants you to understand in a certain way is compared to something you are familiar with. For example, Durkheim argues that suicide is a form of deviance, just as crime is a form of deviance. Both stem from a sense of normlessness or "anomie." There are many other logical devices that authors use, but they all have in common that the authors' arguments make sense. They are logical.

**Anecdote.** Anecdotes are little stories used to illustrate a point. They are especially common in journalistic accounts. A journalistic account of crime would begin with a story about a particular criminal or crime victim, with the unstated assumption that this story is representative of all criminals or victims. A single statistic can be used anecdotally to add credence to a paper. Anecdotes can make a paper "come alive" and hold the reader's interest, but do not substitute for systematic evidence.

**Appeal to authority.** It is quite common to show that someone the reader respects agrees with the author's perspective. This can be either an "expert," whose knowledge of a subject qualifies him or her for respect, or an elite, whose social status or position makes the person believable.

**Controlled study.** This type of book is intended to answer a very specific and empirically verifiable question, such as "Are Catholics less likely to commit suicide than Protestants?" A study designed according to the rules of the scientific method is conducted for this purpose. Durkheim rests his case on a controlled study comparing suicide rates in Protestant and Catholic areas of Europe.

**Rhetorical virtuosity.** This includes a number of devices that can be employed to convince a reader by way of the writer's skill at using language. A well-turned phrase or metaphor may sound poetic due to its selection of words (for example, baby boom, sensuous sixties, animal rights, or law and order). Scientific jargon can give unscientific ideas the sound of authority. Big words or convoluted sentences can make the author sound intelligent and knowledgeable. Humor, satire, or irony can be used to make opposing views sound ridiculous.

What is important is that the student understand what the author is doing, to be able to analyze the devices being used.

## 3. EVALUATION

How well does the author answer his or her question and verify that answer? This is the realm of criticism (both positive and negative). It logically comes last. You can't really judge a text until you fully comprehend what the author is doing and how he or she does it. Evaluation is also the most subjective stage. While an instructor can grade how well you summarize or analyze a work, what you think of the work is your personal opinion. There may be disagreements about evaluation, but ultimately your opinions are your own. However, the line between analysis and evaluation is sometimes fuzzy, and an instructor may legitimately fault you for basing your evaluation on inaccurate summary or sloppy analysis. Instructors also have different tastes concerning how much evaluation they want. Some want students to express their opinions about a text, others just want summary and/or analysis. Evaluation involves asking the following questions:

**Is the argument of the text clear?** Is it clear what question the text is attempting to answer? Are the definitions precise and unambiguous? Are the concepts appropriate to the questions addressed? Are the conclusions explicitly presented or scattered throughout? This dimension of evaluation concerns the summary. If the summary is easy to do, the text rates high on this criterion.

**Does the author make valid assumptions?** Identifying and evaluating an author's assumptions are two of the intellectual skills often demanded in

sociological theory classes. Authors necessarily make assumptions about the way the world works. For example, some theories assume that human beings act primarily on the basis of material self-interest, whereas others assume that people are motivated by the need for social approval. Some theories treat society as the aggregation of individuals, assuming that all social behavior should be reduced to individual behavior. Others assume that there are factors such as social class that can only be understood at the given level of society. Evaluating such assumptions means identifying the author's assumptions to see how plausible they are.

**How well does the text use evidence? Is the evidence adequate to the conclusions?** If the text is based on a specific study, how well was the study performed? If the evidence is less systematic, does it seem to be fairly drawn or carefully selected to favor the author's point of view? This is an area where many beginning students feel ill equipped because they have not been thoroughly trained in methods and may feel they don't know enough about a topic to gauge whether or not the evidence is selective. Some instructors, while admitting such limitations, encourage students to make a stab at this type of evaluation. Most students should have some sense of whether the evidence presented adequately supports the conclusion. One can ask, "Even if this evidence is true, does the author's conclusion necessarily follow?" You will find that the answer is often "no."

**Are the conclusions and implications supported by other works?** There are times when we assume that other works have validity and therefore we compare the text being studied to other works. This is especially common where certain works have achieved a sort of "orthodoxy," at least in the view of some sociologists. One might ask, for example, whether a work by a contemporary writer on deviance legitimately qualifies as a Durkheimian analysis.

**Is the craftsmanship of the writing sound?** Do the parts fit into a whole? Is the prose understandable? Do the ideas flow smoothly from one to another? Craftsmanship is basically the theme of this book. If you were grading the text according to the criteria we have set forth as good writing, how would that text stand up?

It is important to repeat that different instructors have different tastes concerning how much evaluation they want and along what criteria. Some want you to basically stick to the text itself. Others want the text evaluated relative to other works. Some emphasize an evaluation of the logic, others of the evidence, and still others of the assumptions. Make sure you understand the instructor's preferences.

## COMPARE-CONTRAST ASSIGNMENTS

If you are asked to compare and/or contrast two authors' works (or two works by the same author), you must start by identifying the common topic under consideration and use that as the basis for your question. How do these two works deal with an issue that is central to each?

Any or all of these three aspects—summary, analysis, and evaluation—may be relevant to the particular work you are considering. Before you decide which questions will form the basis of your paper, you must read the text—and you must read it in a special way. We recommend that you buy your own copy of the book you will be using, if it is affordable. You will then be able to mark it up.

## HOW TO READ THE TEXT

Before developing your question, get to know the text. As you read, keep in mind three general tasks. First, you must *identify the main points* that are explicitly presented as parts of the argument. Second, you must *identify the author's hidden assumptions*—that is, what she or he takes for granted about how the world works and does not question or bother to justify. These assumptions are like the principles of physics taken for granted in building an engine. Third, you must *evaluate* the text, asking, for example, in what ways the argument is not convincing. What are its problems? How could it be better? Evaluating the argument is like diagnosing which of a car's engine parts do not work and how they could work, or arguing that the whole thing should be junked and stating why.

In other words, as you read you must ask yourself and ask the text the same sorts of questions that you will address in your paper. Following is a more detailed description of the close reading required for textual analysis.

## GETTING TO KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT THE TEXT

Here are some things you must find out in order to become acquainted with the text:

**Who is the author?** What is her or his background? This information is sometimes included in the introduction to the book. If there is no biographical information in the introduction, or if the information is insufficient to give you a picture of the author, there are resources you can use to find out the information.

The *Biography and Genealogy Master Index* contains a list of authors' names, followed by a list of references in which you will find biographical information. The reference book titles are abbreviated; consult the front of the book for the complete titles.

Information on well-known authors—for example, the founders of the discipline—might also be found in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *Encyclopedia Americana*, or *International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences*.

**When was the text written?** What was the social climate of the period? To determine when the text was written, look at the copyright date in the front of the book. If you find more than one date, the first one indicates the date of the original printing or first edition. To determine the historical period in which the text was written, look first to your introduction. If this does not provide adequate information, you can use the preceding sources, paying particular attention to the historical information given in entries on the author or the countries where the author lived.

**What is the polemical context?** That is, where is the text located in the ongoing debate on the question? To whom is the author responding? Sometimes the text will reveal the polemical context by explicitly contrasting the author's argument with other perspectives. This information may be found either in the body of the text or in the preface or introduction. Sometimes it requires reading between the lines, paying attention to how the author refers to other works—for example, by drawing contrasts between her or his position and that of others. If the polemical context is not obvious, look for other books or journal articles about the author or the subject of the text. Often scholars write critiques or commentaries on others' work, especially if it is considered controversial or exemplary. This literature can be found in the library or in their electronic databases. (See Chapter 4 for guidelines about specific references.) Remember, the reference librarian can help you locate sources to help you get the information you need to write your paper.

## READING TWICE

Read the text twice, for different purposes.

First, read for the big picture—get a feel for the text's organization and content. The author has major points that you are looking for. These major points, in turn, are supported by minor points. Pay special attention to the author's introduction, often called a preface, or to a foreword, written by an expert in the field.

After you have completed this preliminary reading, focus on the kind of question you will be addressing in your paper. If your instructor has specified a question, now is the time to consider it carefully. Be sure you understand what information to provide, how deeply to analyze the work, and how much of your own opinion to give. If the assignment is more general, look

back over the categories of questions we listed earlier and decide which approach you will take: Will you analyze the text as a whole? Would you rather focus on a particular concept or aspect of the argument? Or should you compare this work to another one?

With your question in mind, read the text very closely the second time through; this reading forms the core of your "data collection." Your goal is to understand the interconnected points that constitute the author's argument and to record these important points. Notetaking during this second reading is an important step toward writing your paper. We will deal with it in detail later in the chapter.

What are you looking for in this detailed reading? Look for the author's argument—that is, the question the author is trying to answer and the evidence she or he uses to answer it. The following questions will assist you in identifying the text's argument; that is, the author's main points and the assumptions hidden beneath them:

- ♦ What is the author's question? For example, in *Suicide*, Durkheim asks, "What are the social factors that help explain suicide?"
- ♦ What is the author's answer—that is, what provides the core of the argument? What answers have other scholars given? Durkheim argues that the degree of social solidarity within groups that people belong to affects how likely they are to commit suicide. Protestants were more likely than Catholics to commit suicide (when Durkheim lived) because Protestantism provided less social solidarity than Catholicism. He was trying to demonstrate that psychological explanations that emphasized individual pathology were not sufficient.
- ♦ What evidence does the author offer to support this answer? Is the evidence logical or empirical or both? Does the evidence actually support the argument?
- ♦ How does the author get from point A to point B? How do the main points that you identified in your reading relate to one another?
- ♦ What are the assumptions? What does the author take for granted, points without which the argument could not be made? Some examples of fundamental assumptions are that people have free will, that our social order constitutes the normal state of affairs, and that free enterprise benefits everyone.

As you engage in this second reading, you may want to adjust your question. If you planned on analyzing the text as a whole, for example, you may now discover that for this particular paper that task is too broad. If you attempt to explicate a work that is too comprehensive, your analysis may touch on a little bit of everything but fail to cover anything in depth; the result will be a weak analysis. Conversely, you may discover that it is not possible to discuss one concept without analyzing the text as a whole or to explain this text without comparing or contrasting it with another work. If your focus is too narrow, your analysis won't make sense. In any case, remember as you read

to adjust the breadth of your questioning to the particular materials you wish to analyze.

## TAKING NOTES

As C. Wright Mills explains in his appendix, "On Intellectual Craftsmanship," to *The Sociological Imagination* ([1959] 2000), "You will have to acquire the habit of taking a large volume of notes from any worth-while book you read" (p. 199). Taking notes is a personal skill that varies somewhat from student to student. Specific techniques include any or all of the following: writing notes on separate note cards or sheets of paper, writing in the margins of your own copy of the text or on the back of photocopied pages, attaching Post-it notes to specific passages in the text, or writing notes in word-processed files opened up for that specific purpose.

Regardless of where they are physically recorded, carefully taken notes provide two benefits. As Mills explains, "the mere taking of a note from a book is often a prod to reflection. At the same time, of course, the taking of a note is a great aid in comprehending what you are reading" (p. 199). The first kind of note, what Mills calls "a prod to reflection," can take the form of annotations: definitions, cross-references, examples, questions, or other ideas that are triggered in your mind as you read. It is your part of the dialogue you are having with the author.

In the second kind of note, according to Mills, "you try to grasp the structure of the writer's argument" (p. 199). This second kind of note is more objective. It is a systematic restatement of all or part of the author's argument. This summarizing kind of note outlines the author's main points and the interrelationships between the points and the evidence on which they are based. In general, you should paraphrase the author's original words rather than quote them. You should quote only in a few special instances (see Chapter 3).

When you want to use the author's exact words, be sure to mark them as a quotation in your notes so that you will properly cite the source in your paper. You must also document paraphrases (see Chapter 3).

## ORGANIZING YOUR PAPER

Once you have read the text carefully and made notes on the most revealing passages, the next step is to outline your analysis and plan how to present it. The essay format is more suitable than the journal format for textual analysis (see "Developing an Argument: Logic and Structure" in Chapter 1). Within

the basic format there are a number of ways in which you can organize your paper. Here are three basic outline patterns you can use or modify:

- ✦ I. *Organize the body of your paper into three main parts corresponding to the three main tasks involved in explication:*
  1. Summary: Your description of what the author is saying; the author's main points.
  2. Analysis: Your explanation of what is behind the author's argument; for example, the polemical context or debate being addressed, the author's hidden assumptions, the author's evidence, implications of the author's points.
  3. Evaluation: Your assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the author's argument (How well do the main points fit together? How relevant is the evidence to the points being made? How convincing are the conclusions?).
- ✦ II. *Organize the body of your paper into major points that assert what you believe is most important about the text:*
  1. In your introduction, identify the most important features and state your position. You might also want to state the positions of other scholars unless your assignment excludes the use of outside sources.
  2. In the second paragraph (or section, in a longer paper), summarize one main point you want the reader to know in order to accept your point of view and provide detailed evidence from the text to support this point.
  3. Do the same thing in the third and fourth paragraphs (or sections), presenting one more major point in each.
  4. In your conclusion, restate your claims and summarize your points supporting them.
- ✦ III. *Organize your paper around comparing and contrasting:* There are two basic patterns you can follow to compare and contrast two works:

### PATTERN I

- A (1st author)
  - 1 (1st point)
  - 2 (2nd point)
  - 3 (3rd point)
- B (2nd author)
  - 1 (1st point)
  - 2 (2nd point)
  - 3 (3rd point)

### PATTERN II

- 1 (1st point)
  - A (1st author)
  - B (2nd author)
- 2 (2nd point)
  - A (1st author)
  - B (2nd author)
- 3 (3rd point)
  - A (1st author)
  - B (2nd author)

## WRITING YOUR TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Generally, your goal is to answer in writing, in a logical and coherent way, the same questions you have been asking about the text as you read. A review of "Developing an Argument: Logic and Structure" (in Chapter 1) will help you in this task. A tip for developing a cohesive paper is to refer back to the questions you are answering as you write. They can serve as a guide in determining which information you need to make your point and which is extraneous. Keeping your key questions in mind as you write and revise will keep you from wandering. Remember to identify the author and text in your opening paragraph.

When writing a research paper, you must follow a special set of formal conventions for documentation. For textual analysis, however, it is usually sufficient to indicate only in the first reference the publication date of the text you are using. Thereafter you may document quotations with the author's name and appropriate page number. When referring to an idea or argument found more generally throughout the text, the author's name alone, included in one of your own sentences (for example, "Elias states . . ."), will suffice. See pages 53–55 for illustrations of these special citation formats. Consult your instructor for clarification and for her or his preference.

## A SAMPLE STUDENT PAPER

Lysa Agundez's paper was written for a course in culture and personality. The text she chose to analyze is Norbert Elias's *The Civilizing Process*. It was an appropriate choice because Elias's goal is to show how individual psyches and actions take the same shape as the social structure in which they occur. We selected Lysa's paper not only because it illustrates a concise summary of a complex sociological work, but also because of its gritty and interesting subject.

Here Lysa attempts to show how Elias uses the sociological imagination to connect the most personal of experiences with large-scale social relations.

Lysa identified and designed her paper around two key issues in the text she analyzed. The format of her paper is, accordingly, a variation of the three-part essay format—in this case, a two-part format. Our comments on the pages facing the paper indicate how Lysa addressed the three questions we have recommended you consider in any textual analysis: What is the author saying (summary)? What devices does the author use to convince the reader that he or she is correct (analysis)? How well does the author answer his or her question and verify the answer (evaluation)?

Demonstrating a problem many students encounter, Lysa's summary is more complete than her analysis and evaluation. Follow both her well-written paper and our remarks to see the strengths of her work and how it could be made even better.

## OUR COMMENTS

Because of the length of her paper, Lysa includes a title page (as suggested in Part 3); however, she should have included the date.

NORBERT ELIAS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVILIZATION  
THROUGH REPRESSION OF INSTINCTS

Lysa Agundez  
Sociology 134  
Professor Heritage

## OUR COMMENTS

"The nature of this essay" is a vague phrase, and its meaning is unclear. It would be more effective to say: "This essay will address the two most important aspects of Elias's work" or "I will address two important issues raised by Elias."

Note that Lysa plans to address only two issues. Nowhere is it carved in stone that the student *must* have three main points (unless, of course, the assignment specifically says so). Since Lysa has identified two truly key ideas, her paper will have enough substance.

The second paragraph begins Lysa's summary of the first point she intends to address. Her summary is longer and more complete than the analysis and evaluation sections that follow. Although this is a drawback to her paper, in the case of writing as complex as that of Elias, we give her credit just for being able to identify and describe his main points.

Lysa's paper should include a bibliography or reference page, including the publication information on both volumes. As you will see, this is a serious shortcoming of her paper.

While it is helpful to make it clear which ideas expressed are being attributed to Elias, it is a good idea to vary the form of attribution. The repetition of "Elias believes" in this paragraph could have been avoided by using "Elias argues," "Elias maintains," "Elias contends," or other phrases.

Lysa appropriately numbers the pages of her paper.

This paper will discuss the theories of Norbert Elias, who argues that the development of civilization involves a repression of instincts. The nature of this essay entails addressing two issues: (1) The stricter control of emotion and behavior developed following the Middle Ages; and (2) The relationship of shame and the structure of society. Then I will discuss Elias's distinctive contributions to investigation of the civilizing process.

Norbert Elias is a German sociologist, whose two-volume masterpiece is titled *The Civilizing Process*. The first volume, titled *The History of Manners*, is a complete presentation of basic attitude changes of European manners and morals. Examples include attitudes towards bodily functions, table manners, sexual behavior, and aggression. The second volume, titled *Power and Civility*, presents a thorough sociological analysis of the development of civilized behavior formed by the centralization of society.

The process of civilization, Elias believes, involved a progressively stricter control of emotion and habits of restraint which led to socially institutionalized frontiers of shame and emotional standards. Thus, the growth of civilization, Elias believes, involves the gradual intensification of instinctual repression over the centuries. In *The History of Manners*, Elias documents the gradual domestication of human affects and emotions from the Middle Ages to our days. His purpose is to show how the psychological make-up of modern men and women differs in significant ways from their ancestors. Compared to modern man, medieval people, Elias argues, were faced with few barriers to the acting out of affect, be that in the area of aggression, sex, at the dinner table, or in the bedroom.

To prove his point, Elias turns to various etiquette and manners books that have been steadily written and very widely read since the days of Erasmus of Rotterdam. Written mainly for members of European court society, these books exemplify right and wrong behavior. Systematically comparing their changing content over time, Elias takes them as guides to the changing life-styles and sense of propriety on the passing historical scene.

Many of the teachings of Erasmus's book of manners would be taken for granted by most children today. For example, medieval writers tell their readers in quest for refinements of manners that one should not gnaw a bone and then throw it back into the common dish, that diners should not



## OUR COMMENTS

Lysa's use of these examples as evidence for her explication would be strengthened by citing their sources in Elias's text. In fact, with material as colorful as this, direct quotation would liven up the scholarly discussion and keep the reader's interest.

The quotation marks around "natural" are not necessary because the word is not being quoted or used ironically or in a special way.

Lysa does a good job of summarizing the advice offered in the etiquette books that serve as Elias's data. More direct quotations would provide the reader with a stronger sense of the materials he used to reach his conclusions.

It is acceptable to use language normally considered vulgar to describe a historical situation, especially if it is used in the text. Still, if it makes you uncomfortable, or you think it might offend your instructor, you can adopt a euphemism.

"Polite etiquette guides" is redundant, since etiquette by definition involves politeness. Never use two words when one will do!

wipe their nose on their hands or spit into the plate, nor poke in their mouth, nor scratch themselves while eating. These elementary rules were necessary for fifteenth-century feudal nobles, who, in fact, ate with their hands, threw bones to dogs gathered around the table, dipped their fingers in common dishes, and drank from a common goblet.

By the sixteenth century, however, the time of Erasmus, standards became gradually more demanding, and people more self-conscious of their public manners. As time went on, eating habits gradually became more refined. People began to use forks instead of searching with pieces of bread for chunks of meat in the common pot. They were taught that they should use their knives unobtrusively so as not to threaten their neighbors at the table.

Erasmus, in an effort to teach "civility" to the nobility and the aspiring bourgeoisie, did not limit his advice to table manners. With a lack of embarrassment that might seem gross to modern sensibilities, he attempted to teach his public the circumstances in which spitting, farting, urinating, or defecating in public might or might not be defensible.

Spitting, for instance, was a common "natural" bodily function in the Middle Ages. As a matter of fact, it was even considered a custom and was commonplace in the courts of feudal lords. The only major restriction imposed then was that "one should not spit on or over the table but under it" (I, p. 156). In the sixteenth century, people were provided with spittoons. And in our age, the "need" for spitting in public has been altogether abolished.

Farting in public also became prohibited over the civilizing process. In the Middle Ages, it was considered unhealthy to "hold back wind" (I, p. 130). It was better to be emitted with a noise than to be held back. Gradually, however, the feeling of embarrassment increased, and it was instructed to calm your body by farting only while covering the sounds with coughs, or, if one was in a holy place, to press your buttocks together. By the eighteenth century, farting, like spitting, was abolished.

People furthermore used to urinate and defecate in public, and polite etiquette guides simply taught their readers that one should avoid looking at people engaging in these activities. Even in the Palace of Versailles, people used to relieve themselves in corridors and on staircases. As a result, a

The contrast between the reader's stereotypical image of Versailles as a glamorous place and the graphic insight Lysa provides about the use of perfume stimulates a lot of reader interest.

In using "complementary movements," Lysa seems to be making a valiant effort to avoid repetitive use of "changes." Still, because "movement" implies a collective effort of some sort (particularly in sociology), it is somewhat confusing here.

In general, Lysa makes good use of the kinds of transitional words and phrases discussed in Chapter 2. In this case, "Moreover" indicates to the reader that what she reports in this paragraph is additional information relevant to what was discussed in the one preceding.

Did you catch "conceled" as a misspelling of "concealed"? Always proof your final draft for spelling errors, which detract from your presentation and make your ideas more difficult to follow. If you are using a word processor, a spelling check can be done electronically. See Part 3 for tips on correcting misspellings in your final draft.

Since "threshold of shame" is a special term that conveys one of Elias's key concepts, it would be good to define or explain it here, to be sure the reader knows what it means and how it is being used.

Note that, in contrast to the use of quotation marks around "natural" on page 135, their use with "primitive" and "civilized" are appropriate here, since Lysa is using the words to indicate certain analytical definitions of those terms.

This is where Lysa begins her summary of the second point she introduced in the opening paragraph. It is not covered as fully as the first one was.

huge consumption of perfume at the court was required to hide the offensive odors in the palace.

To Elias, these changes are not just curious: they indicate basic changes in the ways human beings perceive themselves and use their bodies in relation to those of others. People now began to mold themselves and others more self-consciously and deliberately than was the wont and use of the Middle Ages. Much of what we now consider "second nature" was the result of a century-long process of gradual domestication. As external restraint against personal emissions gave way to self-restraint, an "invisible wall" gradually grew up between one human body and another.

Elias also documents complementary movements involving sleeping habits and sexuality. Here, also, the public became distinguished from the private sphere. In medieval society it was quite normal for many people, even strangers, to spend the night in one room and even to share the same bed. Today, however, the bedroom has become privatized and separated from the rest of social life.

Moreover, in the Middle Ages it was customary for guests at a wedding to terminate the proceedings by undressing the bride and groom who were then obliged to consummate the marriage in the presence of the assembled company. By the late Middle Ages, the custom gradually changed to the extent that the couple was placed on the bed fully dressed. After this period, sexual life was concealed and dismissed behind the scenes altogether.

Elias argues that these examples of changes in sexual behavior, along with those illustrating changes in standards of self-restraint, mark the advance in the threshold of shame. Noting that restrictions of various kinds surround the elimination of natural functions in many societies, both "primitive" and "civilized," he concludes that the fears of natural elimination and the feeling of shame and repugnance in which it is expressed do not originate from a rational understanding of the origins of certain diseases, as one might think. Actually, our understanding of their dangers is attained only in the nineteenth century, at a very late stage in the civilizing process.

Elias argues that our feelings of distaste and shame are based on changes in the ways people live together in the structure of society. He

Because of this quotation's length, Lysa has appropriately indented and single-spaced the paragraph.

Here is a good example of why it is important to include full publication information for references: when we went to look for more information on this quotation (in this case, to check on correct punctuation), we could not find it on page 8 of our copy of the second volume. Perhaps it is because Lysa used a different edition than we have, but, since no publication information is provided, we cannot tell for sure.

When Lysa claims that Elias's thesis is "convincing," it sounds like she is ready to begin an evaluation of the text. However, she continues her summary without giving the reader any evidence of *why* she believes the thesis is convincing. See the following page for tips on how she might evaluate the text.

Again, Lysa has used quotation marks correctly here, since "courtoisie" is a foreign word. However, if you are using a word processor, you should italicize foreign words. (By the way, it might have been interesting if she had pointed out how it demonstrates the way the tips Erasmus provided became the basis for our idea of and word for "courtesy.")

But why does the phrase "invisible walls" also have quotation marks around it? If it is directly from Elias's work, there should be a citation for it.

By including the concept of "sociological imagination," Lysa is demonstrating her familiarity with basic sociological principles. However, she could apply the idea more fully here. "Sociological imagination" does not just mean using an imaginative approach to research. It involves relating individual experience to large-scale social structures and processes; Elias does this very well by connecting personal habits to the historical formation of a centralized political state.

discusses these changes in social structure at length in *Power and Civility*, in which he announces:

... [T]he civilizing of conduct and the corresponding transformation of human consciousness and libidinal make-up cannot be understood without tracing the process of state formation, and within it the advancing centralization of society which first finds particularly visible expression in the absolute form of life. (II, p. 8)

Despite the cumbersome formulation, Elias's basic thesis is unexpectedly simple and convincing: as society became more centralized, individuals came into close contact and began to exercise greater self-constraint—"more affect control," in Elias's jargon.

For example, Elias believes feudal knights behaved like powerful and uninhibited children. These knights vigorously (and often violently) engaged in self-defense and self-gratification, clearly demonstrating minimal manners. "What was lacking," Elias observes of this impulsive personality, "was the invisible wall of affects which seems now to rise between one body and another, repelling and separating" (II, p. 256). The courtiers who congregated later in absolutist courts were far more careful types; relying now on central royal authority for physical protection, they vied (rarely violently) for influence and advancement. Consequently, the feudal knights increasingly had to regulate their behavior to secure protection and promotions.

Furthermore, crude feudal "courtoisie" was replaced by a more exacting code as courtiers strived to maintain their status, fending off the bourgeoisie below. The threshold of shame and embarrassment rose and rational forethought became a more important guide to conduct; bodily functions hidden, spontaneous impulses suppressed, and more elaborate proprieties established. Henceforth those "invisible walls" were everywhere, creating private selves who anxiously calculated their actions, thereby increasing self-control over passions and emotions.

Elias's ideas are similar to those of other authors, such as Sigmund Freud. So what makes for the distinctive contribution of this book? It is Elias's true leap of the sociological imagination when searching for data through which this process might be documented; his use of etiquette

## OUR COMMENTS

To strengthen her paper, at this point Lysa could have begun an analysis of Elias's work, making clear the ways in which Elias goes about convincing the reader to accept his point of view. (He uses empirical data written during the time he's theorizing about.)

Lysa's evaluation of the text should follow her analysis. This is where she might tell the reader why she believes Elias's basic thesis is "convincing" (perhaps because the data are contemporaneous with social changes that are taking place in people's everyday lives). Alternatively, she might choose to criticize how Elias attempts to justify his argument. (She could, for example, question whether etiquette books, however "juicy" and graphic, are accurate representations of how people live: Would you consider "Dear Abby" books, one author's perspective on relations among those in a certain social class, reflective of *your* everyday life?)

Sometimes students neglect to include criticisms of work they are analyzing because they are afraid it will undermine the strengths pointed out in their papers. However, including Thomas's critique adds to Lysa's paper by showing she is aware of the intellectual discussion he has generated. Unfortunately, there is no citation for Thomas, so there is no way for the reader to judge his credibility or to further investigate his assessment of Elias.

Rather than expressing the author's personal feelings, the conclusion should bring the reader full circle by summarizing or drawing conclusions about the work being discussed or its significance.

manuals was very creative, and his research was very thorough. Even though his work was published forty years after it was written, it is not at all outdated. In fact, it is encompassing and stands complete today.

One might argue that Elias's focus is too narrow. Elias chose to focus only on the transformation of people from the Middle Ages to our times and has eschewed the occasion for a comparative treatment of the subject. As Keith Thomas (1978) has pointed out, Elias says next to nothing about the world of Graeco-Roman antiquity in which a similar process had surely taken place, even though the results of that process were largely lost during the Dark Ages. There is next to nothing in the book about other high civilizations, such as those of Asia, in which one can discern similar trends. But these are, after all, minor matters. One can hardly reproach an author who has given so much for not having written a world history of manners.

In conclusion, I was very happy that I got to work on such an interesting topic. I think one can learn from Elias's detailed method of research—looking in countless manners books and presenting the material the way things really happened and then giving a thorough sociological explanation of civilization.