



The Art and Science of Scientific Writing

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Zur Person

- Studium - Psychologie, Soziologie & Politikwissenschaften
- PhD in Soziologie (NUI Galway, Irland)
- Seit 2015 Professur für Sozialgeographie (Schwerpunkt Nachhaltigkeitsforschung) an der LMU
- **Forschungsinteressen:** Nachhaltigkeit, Konsum, Verkehr & Mobilität

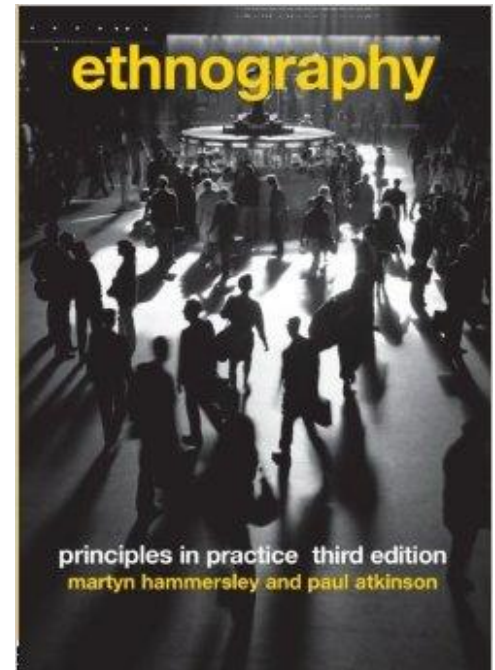
- Aktuelle Projekte:
 - ENERGISE – <http://www.energise-project.eu/>
 - RadAktiv – <https://nationaler-radverkehrsplan.de/de/praxis/radaktiv-identifizierung-typisierung-und>

After data collection: What happens next?

- Data analysis in social research – interpretative process that culminates in written account
- Writing – much more than just the presentation of facts or ‘telling’ about social world

Writing – A Method of Inquiry

Written language is an analytical tool, not a transparent medium of communication. We can never reduce writing to a simple set of “skills” or prescriptions. What is needed is a rigorous understanding of **texts as the product of readers’ and writers’ work** (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:240, emphasis added).



Writing – A Method of Inquiry

- Writing as a way of finding out about yourself and your topic
- How do we create texts that are vital and make a difference?
- **Writing as a method of inquiry** (NOT the end of a process of knowledge acquisition)
- **Dynamic and creative**
- People perform actions of different kinds through their talk and their writing (Potter and Wetherell, 1994).

Writing – A Method of Inquiry

- Qualitative work often inconsistent with dominant ‘writing model’
- ‘Writing up’ research → mechanistic approach at odds with idea of writing as method of discovery
- Processes that aid/hinder the construction of meaning
 - Argumentative strategies and rhetorical tools used by scientists to convince their audience
 - Metaphors and visualisation

Writing – A Method of Inquiry

- **Metaphor** – backbone of social science writing
- Comparisons and analogies
 - Society functions like an organism (Durkheim)
 - ‘Iron cage’ of bureaucracy (Weber)
- Use of metaphors at every level → privileging of a particular order of facts

Example: Weber's Iron Cage

- Iron Cage
 - Industrial, mechanistic world of rational calculation
 - Lacking spirit, ideas
 - Negative sign of rationalization
 - Social life increasingly dominated by rational institutions and practices

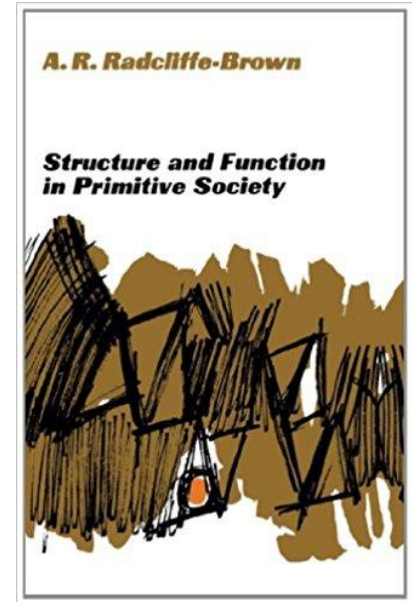


Writing – A Method of Inquiry

- Conventional ways of writing (and knowing) associated with **truth claims**
- BUT: necessity to recognise situational limitations & cultural background of ‘knower’ (= researcher/author)
- **Language does not reflect social ‘reality’ but produces meaning and creates that reality**

Writing – A Method of Inquiry

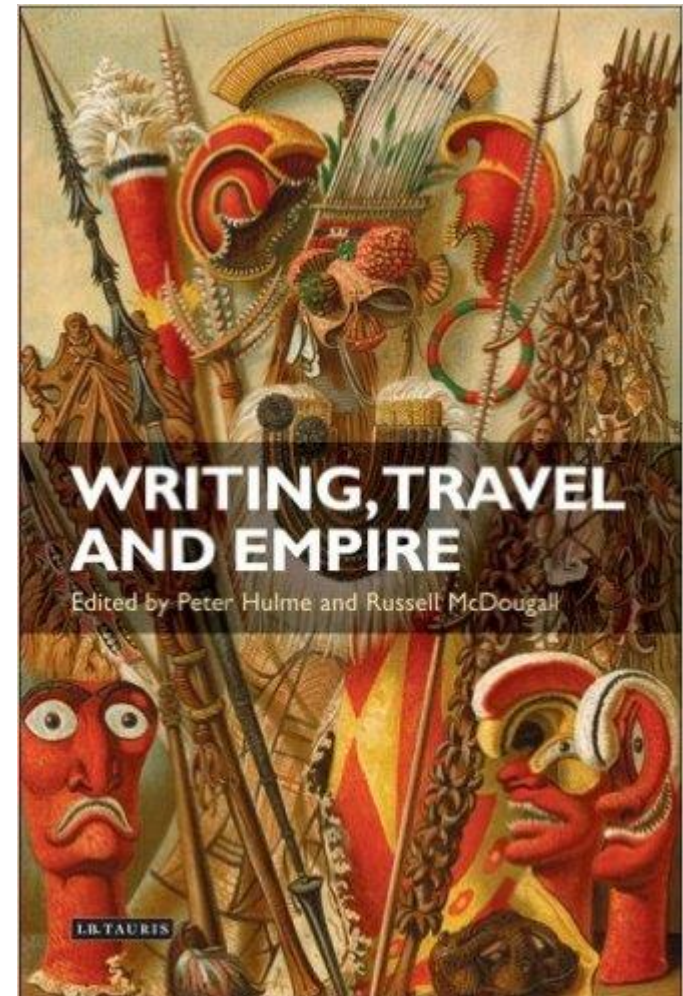
- **Language as site of (power) struggles**
 - Anthropological writing during colonial period
 - Quantification as rhetorical strategy
- **Historical and local specificities**
 - Writing conventions reflect socio-historical conditions → the language of historic materialism



B. Malinowski inspecting a Trobriand girl's soulava necklace. Photo courtesy of Michael Young

Writing – A Method of Inquiry

Having some sense of the history of our writing practices helps us to demystify standard practices [...] Social scientific writing, like all other forms of writing, is a sociohistorical construction and, therefore, mutable (Richardson, 2003:518).



Writing – A Method of Inquiry

- Writing formats determine how we write and what we can write about
- Conventions create and sustain a particular vision of what constitutes **acceptable knowledge**
 - Use of Powerpoint and visual material
 - Impersonal, third-person voice to create distance
- **‘Realist tales’ of social life**

Writing – A Method of Inquiry

- Feminist and postmodern writing practices → experimental representations
- Transgression of boundaries and prescribed conventions
 - First-person format/’narratives of the self’
 - Polyvocality, poetry and drama
 - ‚Animal voices‘

Writing – A Method of Inquiry

- There is no single/right way of staging a text
- BUT: Are alternatives to established writing conventions really the answer?
- New constraints arising from self- reflexive/-conscious writing

Some practical tips and guidelines

Hard choices:

How to find a publication format that suits your work

- **Different publication formats** (e.g. journal article, chapter in edited collection, monograph)
- Different disciplines have (very) different standards → it can be hard to find a good outlet for interdisciplinary work
- **New formats** (e.g. policy briefs, social media posts, blogs etc.)



How to produce high-quality written output

- **Stay focused on the research problem** you are investigating
- Use paragraphs to separate each important point (**'one point per paragraph rule'**)
- Present your points in a logical order
- Use **present tense** to report well accepted facts [e.g., "Angela Merkel is the Chancellor of Germany"]
- Use **past tense** to describe specific results from your study [e.g., "Evidence shows that the impact of the invasion was magnified by events in 1989."]
- **Avoid** including any **superfluous material**

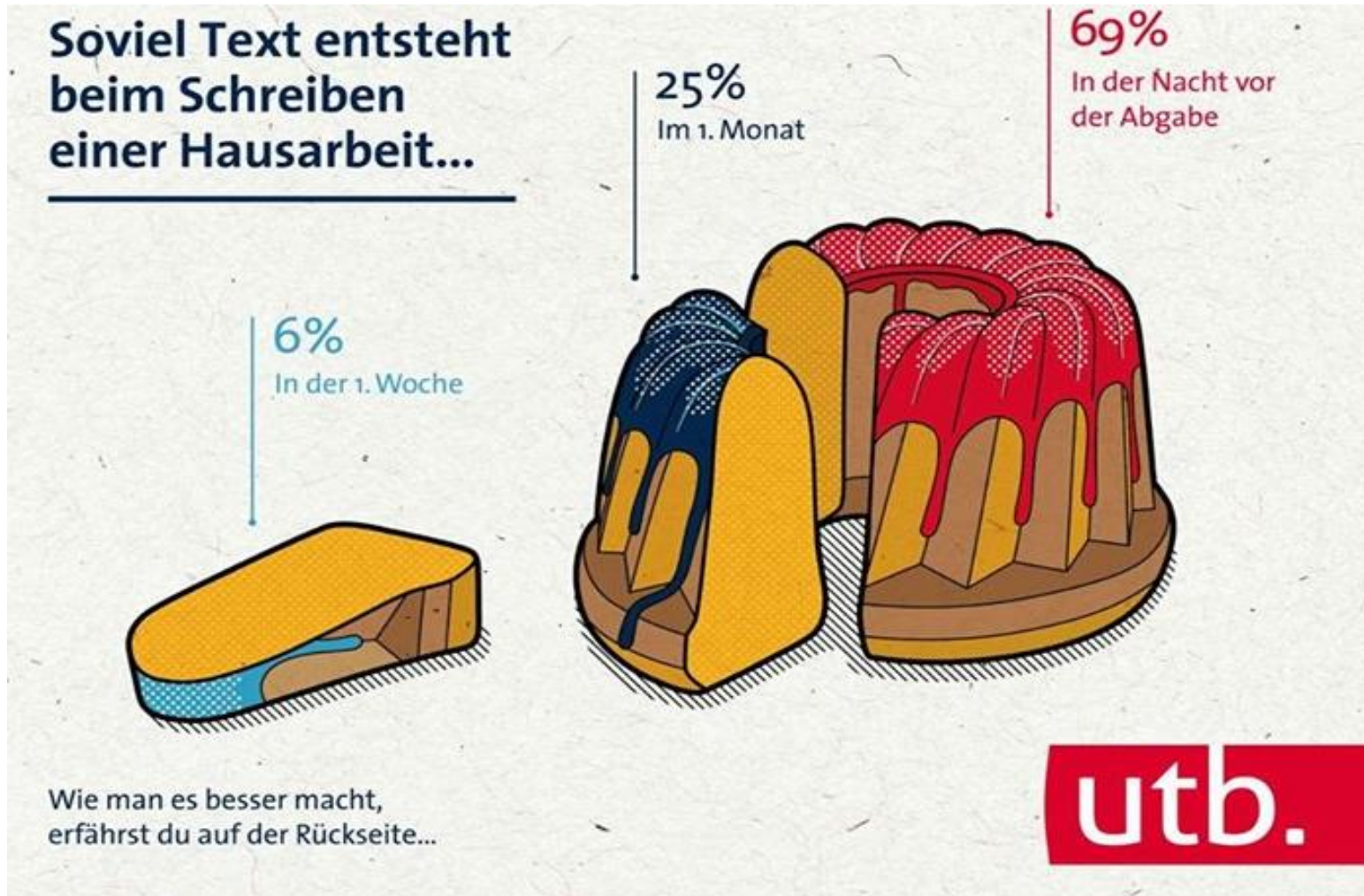
Learning from others

- Choose journal articles that you think exemplify a) mainstream writing conventions and b) the 'gold standard' in qualitative/quantitative writing
- Re-visit one of your own papers/articles which you liked best/for which you received excellent feedback

Planning

- Plan your publication well
- **Write out the main points** on some rough paper and **re-arrange them** into a more logical order (,mind map‘)
- **Jot down new ideas** and **try to integrate them**
- Consider **writing an introduction/ abstract/ ,roadmap‘ first**, to clarify **what** you are going to say and **whereabouts in the text** you are going to say it

Time management



Images of the lone writer ?

- ‚A problem shared is a problem halved‘ -consider **collaborative forms of writing**
- **Consider starting a ‚writing club‘** – very suitable for small groups of postgraduate students



Recommended reading

- Theisen, Manuel R. (2013): *Wissenschaftliches Arbeiten. Erfolgreich bei Bachelor- und Masterarbeit*. 13. Aufl., München: Vahlen.
- Richardson, L. (2003) 'Writing: A Method of Inquiry', In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp.516-529.
- Hughes, C. (1994) 'From Field Notes to Dissertation: Analyzing the Stepfamily', in A. Bryman and R.G. Burgess (eds) *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. London: Routledge, pp.35-46.
- Mason, J. (1994) 'Linking Qualitative and Quantitative Data Analysis', in A. Bryman and R.G. Burgess (eds) *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. London: Routledge, pp.89-110.
- Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1995) *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 2nd edition. London: Routledge, pp.239-262 (ch.9).

 <http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/purpose>