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978-1-107-02705-3 - Learn to Write Badly: How to Succeed in the Social Sciences

Michael Billig

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## Learn to Write Badly

Modern academia is increasingly competitive yet the writing style of social scientists is routinely poor and continues to deteriorate. Are social science postgraduates being taught to write poorly? What conditions adversely affect the way they write? And which linguistic features contribute towards this bad writing? Michael Billig's witty and entertaining book analyses these questions in a quest to pinpoint exactly what is going wrong with the way social scientists write. Using examples from diverse fields such as linguistics, sociology and experimental social psychology, Billig shows how technical terminology is regularly less precise than simpler language. He demonstrates that there are linguistic problems with the noun-based terminology that social scientists habitually use – 'reification' or 'nominalization' rather than the corresponding verbs 'reify' or 'nominalize'. According to Billig, social scientists not only use their terminology to exaggerate and to conceal, but also to promote themselves and their work.

MICHAEL BILLIG has been Professor of Social Sciences at Loughborough University for more than twenty-five years and has written books on a variety of different subjects. Among his books are *Freudian Repression* (Cambridge, 2009) and *Arguing and Thinking* (Cambridge, 1987 and 1996).

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# Learn to Write Badly

*How to Succeed in the Social Sciences*

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Michael Billig

*Department of Social Sciences  
Loughborough University*



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To Ari, Monica, Hannah, Elsie and Artie

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As always, I am grateful to Sheila and our family. The last decade has seen a shift in our family. The older generation has now passed and a new generation has begun to emerge. I dedicate this book to our new generation. In this book, I criticize the present, but without looking into the future with optimism. That is my failing because, when I look at our grandchildren and see the joy that they bring, it is easy to be optimistic.