Farganis, James. 2008. Readings in Social Theory: The Classic Tradition to Post-Modernism. 5th ed. Boston. McGraw Hill. ISBN 978-0-07-352813-7

ABSTRACTS COMPONENTS

A good abstract will require about 2-3 single-spaced pages.

Your abstracts will include three components:

1. Central thesis of the writing: What main premise(s) is the author trying to convey about society or social organization? Your central thesis should be only a few sentences at most. This exercise is valuable to develop your ability to hone in on the essence or the heart of a theory. Imagine being asked by your mother/father, son/daughter or spouse to explain the theory, and you have only 30 seconds in which to do so. [IMPORTANT NOTE: Sometimes readings within a chapter are different enough that you will feel more comfortable writing a separate central thesis for each. This is especially the case later in the semester, when chapters on contemporary sociology contain readings by more than one theorist. You are always welcome to submit a central thesis for each reading in a chapter.]

2. Answer chapter Thought Questions that I've posted for each chapter folder inside the main Abstracts folder. For assigned readings in each chapter, I provide a set of questions for you to answer. Please use these thought questions to sensitize you to major points of the theory. Simply launching into theoretical readings can inspire a feeling of "ungroundedness," particularly when excerpts of larger written works are used. Thus, I intend for these questions to assist you in focusing on central aspects of the theory.

3. Theoretical dimensions analysis: Built into any perspective is a number of assumptions and assertions about society. Below is a schema of theoretical dimensions that basically serves as a taxonomy. Understanding these dimensions and learning to recognize how the assumptions and assertions of a theory can generally be classified into one or the other of each dimensions categories is a powerful tool for efficiently understanding theoretical perspectives. Because the various strands of sociological theory are so numerous, this schema for classifying theories will reduce the "clutter" into more manageable information.

➤ Macro v. Micro: Does the theory consider it more important to understand macro-level phenomena such as social classes and widely held beliefs, or is it more important to understand micro level phenomena like small group interaction dynamics and/or social actor background to understand and explain the social world?

➤ Materialist v. Idealist: Do material social conditions like ownership of property and material wealth or do ideas like values, norms, and beliefs offer the most power in explaining the social world?

➤ Conflict v. Consensus: Is social organization more a product of conflicting relations (or oppressively coerced relations) between members of a society or is wide-spread agreement more responsible for social organization?

➤ Determined v. Free-will: Do members of a society have freedom to act as they please, or is individual behavior largely determined by social structural phenomena?

➤ Scientific Epistemology v. Not: Can and should those who study the social world use the methods of scientific inquiry, or should social investigators not use science to understand the social world? I want students to determine 1) whether the theory explicitly or implicitly advocates the use of the scientific method as the best way to investigate our social world, or 2) when explicit or implicit evidence is lacking in the reading, decide whether you think that the theory portrays society as understandable/explainable through the use of scientific method. For the scientific method to be useful, the object of study must have these essential characteristics: observable, patterned (versus extremely idiosyncratic), and have some stability across time and space (versus a single event).