

SOC 620: PROFESSIONAL WRITING FOR SOCIOLOGISTS¹
WINTER 2024

Class: Th 3:00-6:00pm
Room: 4155 LSA

Instructor: Professor Robert Jansen
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Office Hours: By appointment.

INTRODUCTION

This is a course in professional writing targeted at sociologists. It focuses on journal articles, but will include discussion of other genres of scholarly writing as well (books, book reviews, etc.).

Admission is by application only. All students must enter the course with a paper that is ready to be revised for submission to a peer-reviewed journal. This paper should take the form of a typical journal article (with more or less discrete sections for the introduction, theoretical argument, data and measures, results, and discussion/conclusion). During the class, you'll rewrite the paper so that it meets professional standards.

The primary goal is to prepare graduate students to publish in peer reviewed social science journals. The hope is that all papers will be ready to be submitted to a journal by the end of the semester. Since publishing in a peer-reviewed outlet is a prerequisite for most jobs in sociology today, graduate students must publish before they finish their graduate work or be seriously limited in their academic job options. Of course, enrollment in this class is no guarantee of publishing success. Publication is an arduous and idiosyncratic process. But it is my hope is that this course will give you the tools to work your way through it—and to revise future papers in a fast, efficient, and clear way.

Note that this course is focused on *formal*, not *substantive* revision. We begin with the assumptions that your data are good, that your analyses are sound, that your characterization of the literature is accurate, etc. You are independently responsible for any substantive revisions on these counts. This is *not* to imply that sociological writing is only a rhetorical exercise, but simply to note that completing a solid research project is just the first step in the publication process.

For my own records, please keep me informed as to the final disposition of your paper (regardless of what, or when, that might be).

¹ *Acknowledgement:* This course is modeled on one taught by Rebecca Emigh at UCLA in the early 2000s.

GENERAL EXPECTATIONS

The success of this course depends heavily upon the active participation of every student. This means participating in discussions, completing weekly revisions on your paper, reading all required readings (including the weekly workshop paper), fulfilling your role as discussant twice over the course of the semester, and completing all take-home exercises and activities. If you fail to meet expectations on any of these counts, you will be asked to drop the class.

Note that this means that this course will require considerably more work than the standard departmental workshops. When planning your semester's workload, you should think of this course as analogous to any other graduate seminar.

COURSE STRUCTURE AND ASSOCIATED REQUIREMENTS

Each class session will be divided into two roughly equal parts, each with its own requirements. These parts will be separated by a ten-minute break.

PART ONE

The first half of each class session will take a seminar form and be devoted to a particular issue relevant to academic writing. There will be some lecture; but most of the seminar time will involve active discussion of assigned readings and activities.

As for the readings: I've kept these to a minimum, so please be sure to have digested what little has been assigned before class. There will be no assigned discussants for the readings—*everyone* is responsible for attending to interesting and/or problematic points and bringing these to the attention of the class.

As for the activities: We may have more or fewer of these, but I reserve the right to assign some kind of at-home activity as often as every week. (Examples include identifying your target journals, diagramming model articles, etc.) When I do assign such an activity, everyone is responsible for completing it *before* class.

When you have an at-home assignment, I will provide instructions the previous week and post these on Canvas. Your response should take the form of an informal analytical memo. The purpose of these memos is to focus your reflections through actually committing words to the page. The written document should thus be more about pinning down your thoughts and providing a baseline for class discussion than creating a finished piece of formal writing (although sentences and paragraphs are still a must). *You do not need to submit your memos to me for evaluation—these are for your own reflection—but it is critical that you actually do the assignments, commit them to writing, and bring your writing to class for your reference.* Like with the readings, everyone is responsible for attending to interesting and/or problematic points that come up over the course of the activities and for bringing these to the attention of the class.

PART TWO

The second half of each class will consist of a student-led workshopping session. These sessions will operate differently from traditional workshops, in that they're designed to identify strengths and weaknesses in *how the author is communicating their ideas* (rather than to provide a forum for critiquing the substance of the work per se). The main way we'll achieve this is by juxtaposing all of our descriptive readings of each paper against one another (i.e., comparing what we think the paper is trying to say and how it supports that idea). This requires that we adopt specific procedures and roles:

Procedure: Each student's paper will be workshopped once over the course of the semester. Everyone is responsible for reading each paper carefully and preparing detailed responses before class. The session will be organized as follows: (1) roughly *twenty minutes* for comments by two primary discussants (ten minutes each); (2) roughly *thirty minutes* for comments from the rest of the class (all except the author); (3) roughly *ten minutes* for the author to respond; and then (4) up to *twenty minutes* for further open discussion of more substantive critiques and suggestions.

In addition to the more specific tasks outlined below, *everyone* should answer the following four questions for each paper. You should strive to answer these in just one sentence apiece, and write them down (fair warning: this can be quite difficult!).

THE FOUR QUESTIONS²

1. What does the author want to know? (Or, what's the "central question"?)
2. Why does the author want to know it? (Or, what's the "originating question"?)
3. What's the author's answer? (Or, what's the "argument" or "substantive theory"?)
4. How does the author go about finding out if their answer is correct? (Or, what are the data and methods?)

Author Role: Please email me a copy of your paper one week before it's to be discussed (i.e., the preceding Thursday). The only additional preparation I ask is that you come to class ready to answer the "four questions" for your own paper—so you can compare your answers to those of your classmates. Otherwise, your main job is to listen. (Note that you're not even allowed to speak for the first fifty minutes of the session!)

Discussant Role: Two students will serve as primary discussants for each paper—meaning that you will each play this role twice during the semester. When you act as discussant, you're responsible for providing a ten-minute summary of the paper, in which you simply try to convey your understanding of it as best you can. You should

² These are based on a similar set used by Maurice Zeitlin in teaching Classical Sociological Theory at UCLA in the early 2000s. Zeitlin likely got them from Robert K. Merton (1959). They have since been elaborated and passed along to a new generation of PhD students at UC Berkeley by Dylan Riley, who learned them from Zeitlin at UCLA (as I did).

go through the paper systematically to identify its main research question and argument, discuss its overall structure and what each section contributes to this, and identify points of strength, clarity, confusion, vagueness, and so on. That is, your summary should consist of your best effort to *describe* the main points of the paper and analyze how it works. Do *not* critique the substance of the paper or suggest revisions in your initial summary—please hold these for the last twenty minutes of the workshop session. At some point in your remarks, you should introduce your answers to the “four questions.”

Non-Discussant Class Member Role: On the weeks in which you’re *not* serving as discussant, you must still read the paper and attend to all of the same issues (including answering the “four questions”). You and your other non-discussant classmates will be responsible for carrying the second phase of the conversation, by responding to and building on the discussants’ summaries. In addition to offering your comments verbally in class, you should provide these to the author in written form—either as a memo or as marginal comments on an electronic copy of the paper.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENT: ONGOING REVISING

You should also work on editing your *own* paper every week, incorporating general principles from the class.

To help you keep the momentum going, I’ll be providing detailed line edits along the way. Most weeks, I will comment in detail on about 3 to 4 pages of your paper. Please submit your paper by email (in .doc or .docx format) by 11:00am on Tuesdays; I’ll comment in track changes and do my best to return them by Thursday evening that same week. (This is a strict deadline: if your paper isn’t in by 11:00am Tuesday, I won’t be able to read it that week.) Please type in the paper, in very large font, “START HERE” and “END HERE.” I’ll search on START HERE, so please type it exactly that way. Also, please paginate your manuscript. I’ll usually go from the beginning to end of the paper in order; but we may also modify the order depending on how your revisions are going. Since you’ll become better editors over time, and because the beginning of the paper sets up the rest, it’s quite common to work on the beginning longer than the rest of it. (It’s also common for us not to get through the entire paper by the end of the semester, and this is fine; the point is not to line edit your full manuscript, but to teach writing lessons through the editing process that can be applied to all of your writing.)

You may submit your paper for the first round of editing by 11:00am on Tuesday, January 16. Please do *not* submit papers for line edits the week your paper is being workshopped, the week of Feb. 1 (when class is canceled), during spring break, or on April 11 or 18 (by which point you should be polishing your final draft). This leaves ten weeks in which you may submit your paper for comments. I’ll give you three freebees; so please submit your paper *seven* of these remaining ten weeks. (And please don’t submit more than seven times—this is my maximum capacity!)

Regardless of whether or not you'll be submitting your paper for line edits that week, you should try to revise as much of it as possible every week. Your first priority should be incorporating my comments from the previous round of edits; but you should also try to go beyond that, polishing up other sections of the draft as you can. As the class proceeds, you'll find that you're able to apply general principles from the readings and seminar discussions, as well as from my line edits, to sections of the text on which we haven't yet focused. The ultimate goal is to make you better editors of your own papers—and thus, in the long run, less dependent upon others' comments—so please do revise on your own as much as possible!

The final version of your paper is due by 5pm on the last day of winter classes: Tuesday, April 23.

READINGS

Required:

Belcher, Wendy Laura. 2009. *Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Note: this is the first edition of this book, and a .pdf of the whole thing is available on the Canvas site. You're welcome to purchase the second edition instead, but you'll have to cross-check the page numbers with the first edition to make sure you're reading the right parts each week.

* All other required readings are available in the weekly Canvas Modules (and in the "Supplemental Readings" folder in Canvas Files).

Supplemental Readings:

There is an overwhelming number of readings available on professional writing, in sociology and beyond. I have compiled an extensive list of supplementary readings (posted on Canvas), as well as links to online articles, blogs, and other websites. I encourage you to read as many of these as you can along the way—and let the rest of the class know if you discover anything particularly useful!

COURSE SCHEDULE

January 11: Introduction

Reading: None

Assignment: None

Workshop: Individual meetings with Rob (15 minutes each)

January 18: The Practice of Writing

First opportunity for line edits (revised draft must be submitted by 11am Tuesday)

Reading:

Belcher (pp. 1-10, 18-24, 26-38)

Colucci, Lina Avancini. 2018. "The Tomato Method: How I Finished My PhD at MIT." (Blog post—see Assigned Readings folder.)

Assignment:

- Belcher activities on emotions (pp. 2, 3, 4)

- Create a list of revising tasks (as suggested in Belcher, pp. 60-61)

- Create a work log (as suggested in Belcher, pp. 39-41)

Workshop: Student Paper 1

January 25: Audience 1: Targeting a Journal

Guest: Elizabeth Popp Berman (Organizational Studies)

Reading:

Belcher (pp. 44-53, 101-136)

Assignment:

- Select three potential journals and choose your target

- Select two model articles and consider how this informs your revision plans

Workshop: Student Paper 2

February 1: ***NO CLASS (attend Auyero Talk if you like, 4:00-5:30 in 4154)***

Revised paper drafts still accepted for line edits this week

February 8: Argument and Structure

Reading:

Belcher (pp. 82-92, 69-81, 172-186)

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. 2008. "Making Good Arguments: An Overview." Pp. 108-118 in Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

White, Lynn. 2005. "Writes of Passage: Writing an Empirical Journal Article." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67:791-798.

Zuckerman, Ezra W. 2017. "On Genre: A Few More Tips to Article-Writers." (Working document posted online.)

Assignment:

- Required: Diagram a model journal article

Workshop: Student Paper 3

February 15: Audience 2: The Literature Review

Reading:

Belcher (pp. 140-168)

Zald, Mayer N. 1995. "Progress and Cumulation in the Human Sciences after the Fall." *Sociological Forum* 10:455-479.

Assignment:

- Diagram your own article as it currently exists

- Revise your article outline as needed

- Suggested: Revision exercises in Belcher (pp. 93-96)

Workshop: Student Paper 4

February 22: Presenting Evidence

Guests: Sasha Killewald; Alex Murphy (via Zoom)

Reading:

Belcher (pp. 190-199)

Matthews, Sarah H. 2005. "Crafting Qualitative Research Articles on Marriages and Families." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67(4): 799-808.

Miller, Jane E. 2005. *The Chicago Guide to Writing about Multivariate Analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Pp. 317-348)

Assignment:

- Scan model articles for strong presentation of data; make a list of characteristics

- Identify pitfalls as well

Workshop: No workshop today. *Class adjourns at 4:30.*

February 29: ***NO CLASS: Spring Break***

Do not submit revised paper draft this week

March 7: Openings and Closings

Reading:

Belcher (pp. 202, 209-218)

Grant, Adam M., and Timothy G. Pollock. 2011. "Publishing in AMJ—Part 3: Setting the Hook." *Academy of Management Journal* 54: 873-879.
Assignment: TBD
Workshop: Student Paper 5

March 14: Micro-Editing for Style and Economy

Reading: Belcher (pp. 236-265)
Assignment: TBD
Workshop: Student Paper 6

March 21: Abstracts and Titles

Reading:
Belcher (pp. 54-57, 203-209)
One reading of your choice from the supplemental list
Assignment:
- Scan model articles for good titles and abstracts
Workshop: Student Paper 7

March 28: Article Submission and Review

Guest: Erin Cech (for workshop)
Reading:
Belcher (pp. 227-228, 267-268, 271-284, 287-319)
Assignment:
- Scan revisions history of Rob's MA paper, esp. timeline
- Revise your title and abstract (and submit to class)
- Review your colleagues' titles and abstracts before class
Workshop: Student Titles and Abstracts

April 4: From Dissertation to Book/Articles

Guest: Karin Martin
Reading:
Germano, William. 2005. *From Dissertation to Book*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Pp. 12-30, 38-47, 51-78)
Clemens, Elisabeth S., Walter W. Powell, Kris McIlwaine, and Dina Okamoto. 1995. "Careers in Print: Books, Journals, and Scholarly Reputations." *American Journal of Sociology* 101(2):433-494.
Assignment: TBD
Workshop: TBD

April 11: Evaluative Writing (Book Reviews and Article Refereeing)

Do not submit revised paper draft this week; continue revising final version

Reading:

Belcher (pp. 223-227)

King, Braden. 2011. "[The Editors Speak: What Makes a Good Review](#)" Blog post on *Orgtheory*. (read blog post *and* comments).

Sica, Alan. 2012. "Polite Culture: Nice-Nellyism Suffuses Sociology." *Contemporary Sociology* 41(3): 275-278.

Freese, Jeremy. 2012. "[Are Sociologists too Nice?](#)" Blog post on *Scatterplot*. (read blog post *and* comments).

Assignment:

- Required: Scan book reviews for basic principles
- Required: Scan article referee comments (Rob's *AJS* pdf., or other)

Workshop: Paired Paper Exchange

April 18: Writing Into the Future

Do not submit for line edits this week; continue revising final version

Guest: Chelle Jones (620 alum)

Reading:

Belcher (pp. xvi-xx [sections on writing with a partner or writing group])

Silvia, Paul J. 2007. *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. (Pp. 49-57)

Jensen, Joli. 2015. "Don't Go it Alone." Blog post (pdf located in Canvas: Files / Supplemental Readings).

Assignment:

- Prepare for final paper debrief

Workshop: Final paper debrief (10 minutes each, as a group)

Final paper due Tuesday, April 23, 5:00pm