

SOC 595: PROFESSIONAL WRITING FOR SOCIOLOGISTS¹
FALL 2018

Class: T 3:00-6:00pm
Room: G463 Mason Hall

Instructor: Professor Robert Jansen
Email: rsjansen@umich.edu
Office: 4222 LSA
Office Hours: By appointment (see below).

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 will 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 publication 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 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 analysis is 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 just a rhetorical exercise; only to note that completing a sound analysis 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.

I have not listed any specific office hours for this course, but am more than happy to meet with you individually by appointment. My preference is to set such appointments for immediately before or after this class. If that doesn't work, late afternoons are best for me.

GENERAL EXPECTATIONS

The success of this course depends 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.

The final version of your paper is due by Friday, December 14, by 5:00pm. Please email me an electronic copy and leave a hard copy in my departmental mailbox.

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 or problematic points and for 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 (in the "Assignments" folder, under "Files"). 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 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 workshop session. Everyone is responsible for reading the workshop material (usually a student paper) and preparing responses before class. When we are discussing a student paper, the session will be organized as follows: roughly twenty minutes for comments by two primary discussants (10 minutes each); roughly thirty minutes for comments from the whole class; roughly ten minutes for the author to respond; and then up to twenty minutes for further open discussion of more substantive critiques and suggestions.

Each of your papers will be discussed once during the workshop portion of the course. (You will sign up for slots on the first day of class.) Please email me a copy of your paper for distribution one week before your scheduled “presentation” date. No additional preparation is required for the week in which your paper is discussed.

Two students will serve as primary discussants for each paper—meaning that you will be a discussant twice during the semester. (You will sign up for discussant slots on the first day of class). When you serve as a discussant, you are responsible for providing a ten-minute *summary* of the paper. In this summary, your job is simply to try to *understand* the paper. You should go through the paper systematically to identify the main research question and argument, discuss the structure of the paper, consider what each section contributes to this structure, identify points of clarity, strength, confusion, vagueness, straying from topic, and so on. That is, your summary should consist of your best effort to *describe* the main points of the paper and to analyze how it works. Do *not* critique the substance of the paper or suggest revisions in your summary—please hold these comments for the last phase of the workshop session.

On the weeks in which you are *not* serving as a discussant, you must still read the paper and attend to the same issues. In addition to being ready to offer your comments verbally in class, you should provide these to the author in written form—either as marginal notes on a printed copy of the paper, or as a memo to the author.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENT: ONGOING REVISING

You should also work on editing your *own* paper *every week*. Each week, I’ll comment in detail on about 3 to 4 pages of your paper. Please email the papers to me (in .doc or .docx format) by 11:00am every Tuesday. I’ll comment in track changes and email them back by Thursday evening that same week. (This is a strict deadline. If your paper is not in by 11:00am Tuesday, I will *not* 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. Please name the file according to the convention: “595lastname WK[#]” (so I would name my week 2 submission “595jansen WK2”). Also, please

paginate your manuscript. We will 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 will become better editors over time, and because the beginning of the paper sets up the rest, it is quite common to work on the beginning longer than the rest of it. (It is 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.)

Please submit your paper for the first round of editing by 11:00am on Tuesday, September 11. (This means that you need to start your first round of editing immediately after the first class session.) Please do *not* submit papers for line edits the week in which your paper is to be workshopped, on October 16 (fall break), on November 6 (I'll be traveling to SSHA on the 7th and unable to edit), or on December 4 or 11 (by which point you should be finalizing your draft). This leaves nine weeks in which you may submit for comments. I'll give you two freebees; so please submit your paper for review seven of these nine remaining weeks. (And please do not submit more than seven times; this is my maximum capacity!)

Regardless of whether or not you will be submitting your paper for my comments that week, you should try to edit as much of the paper 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 will find that you are able to apply general principles and my comments to sections of the text that I have not read. 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 edit as much as possible.

READINGS

Required:

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

* All other required readings are available in the “Supplemental Readings” folder on Canvas, under “Files.”

Supplemental Readings:

There are an overwhelming number of readings available on professional writing, in sociology and beyond. I have compiled an extensive list of supplementary readings (on Canvas), as well as links to online articles, blogs, and other websites.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (September 4): Introduction

Reading: None

Assignment: None

Workshop: Individual meetings with Jansen (15 minutes each)

Week 2 (September 11): The Practice of Writing

First revised draft of paper submitted by today, 11:00am

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

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

Week 3 (September 18): Audience 1: Targeting a Journal

Guest: Erin Cech

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

Workshop: Student Paper 2

Week 4 (September 25): 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.

Mann, Michael. 1981. "Socio-Logic." *Sociology* 15: 544-550.

Assignment:

- Required: Diagram a model journal article

Workshop: Student Paper 3

Week 5 (October 2): Audience 2: The Literature Review*Reading:*

Belcher (pp. 140-168)

Swedberg, Richard. 2012. "Theorizing in Sociology and Social Science: Turning to the Context of Discovery." *Theory and Society* 41:1-40.

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

Week 6 (October 9): Presenting Evidence

Guests: Jennifer Barber, Al Young

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: Student Paper 5

Week 7: ***NO CLASS: Fall Break***

Do not submit revised paper draft this week

Week 8 (October 23): 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: TBA

Workshop: Student Paper 6

Week 9 (October 30): Abstracts and Titles

Reading: Belcher (pp. 54-57, 203-209)

Assignment:

- Scan model articles for good titles and abstracts

Workshop: Student Paper 7

Week 10 (November 6): Micro-Editing for Style and Economy

Do not submit revised paper draft this week

Guest: Sara McClelland

Reading: Belcher (pp. 236-265)

Assignment:

- Revise your title and abstract
- Review your colleagues' titles and abstracts before class

Workshop: Student Titles and Abstracts

Week 11 (November 13): Article Submission and Review

Reading: Belcher (pp. 227-228, 267-268, 271-284, 287-319)

Assignment:

- Scan revisions history of my MA paper, esp. timeline

Workshop: Student Paper 8

Week 12 (November 20): Book Writing

Guest: Jason Owen-Smith

Reading:

Germano, William. 2005. *From Dissertation to Book*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Pp. 12-30, 38-47, 51-78)

Assignment: TBA

Workshop: TBA

Week 13 (November 27): Evaluative Writing (Book Reviews and Article Refereeing)*Reading:*

Belcher (pp. 223-227)

King, Braden. 2011. "The Editors Speak: What Makes a Good Review" (read blog post *and* comments). Blog post on *Orgtheory*. Linked on Canvas: Files / Web Resources / Web Articles, Videos, Etc.

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

Freese, Jeremy. 2012. "Are Sociologists too Nice?" (read blog post *and* comments). Blog post on *Scatterplot*. Linked on Canvas: Files / Web Resources / Web Articles, Videos, Etc.

Assignment:

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

Workshop: Paired Paper Exchange

Week 14 (December 4): Shaping Your Professional Persona

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

Reading:

Cohen, Philip N. February 8, 2016. "Basic Self Promotion," *Family Inequality* (blog). (<https://familyinequality.wordpress.com/2016/02/08/basic-self-promotion/>)

One reading of your choice from the supplemental list

Assignment:

- Browse job market websites and CVs and come up with dos and don'ts

Workshop: Reports to class on the supplemental reading you selected

Week 15 (December 11): Writing Into the Future

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

Guest: Spencer Garrison (595 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 Friday, December 14, 5:00pm