Writing is more than a means to communicate; it provides us with a special tool to nurture our analytical and creative thinking. These capacities facilitate success in social science scholarship and even in fields that put less emphasis on epistolary dimensions of work. “Reading and Writing for Sociology” trains students in the comprehension, structure, mechanics, analysis, and practice of formal academic writing. In the first part of the course, we will cover the fundamentals of the writing process, including structure, technique, mechanics, and analytical forms. We will apply these fundamentals in our analysis of substantive readings. The second part of the course focuses on more-advanced training as we move from writing shorter essays to a slightly-longer paper. These advanced components of reading and writing include style, expression of personal voice, creativity, and integrating theory with analysis.

My pedagogy includes training in the explicit and implicit knowledge essential for social analysis. Training in explicit knowledge will occur through instruction, explanation, and discussion. Training in implicit knowledge will involve practicing analytical techniques and observing how others apply them. Goals of this course include an increased ability to think critically, analyze social phenomena, work with theory, construct logical arguments supported by evidence, comprehend sociological texts, and enjoy scholarly activity.

Instructional readings on how to write analytical essays—and how to write well more generally—provide a foundation for our discussions and exercises. Additionally, we will read texts from various substantive areas of sociology in order to learn from the structure of their analysis and respond to their arguments. We will ask questions such as: 1) what arguments do these authors make? 2) what is their evidence 3) what is their methodology? 4) what is the scholarly context of their analysis?

Work for this course includes the preparation required for each meeting, in-class writing exercises, participation in discussions, peer-editing assignments, and three essay papers. These progressively-more-challenging essays are designed to train students in: 1) the fundamental structure of essay writing; 2) how to analyze texts; 3) how to construct a thesis claim and support it with evidence and logic; 4) how to apply theory. Throughout the semester you will practice writing with attention to formal detail, structure, mechanics, style, creativity, and the quality of your argument and analysis.

Assignments and Grading

Two categories of work determine your grade for the course. The first area includes attendance, participation in discussions, and in-class peer review and writing exercises.

Participation is essential. Students are expected to participate regularly by contributing to
our discussions. However, please don't come to class if you don't feel well. You can miss two classes before it directly affects your participation grade. Do not email me about missing class unless you will miss more than two. Please be mindful of group dynamics so that everybody feels comfortable to speak up. Keeping up with the weekly readings is a condition of possibility for meaningful participation. There will be relatively short, in-class writing opportunities to provide you a structure that helps you keep up. The nature of these opportunities will vary and they will be integrated into every session. In-class writing cannot be made-up under any circumstances.

There will also be three essay assignments. The first two will each be three-pages long, while the third will be six to eight pages long. For each essay, you will turn in a first draft, receive feedback on it, and then submit a revised second draft. It is important to integrate the feedback you receive. You will receive a grade for each draft. Specific instructions for each essay will become available as the semester unfolds. Each essay must be formatted: 1” margins, doubled-spaced, pagination, 12-point Times New Roman font, bibliography, standard citations, two spaces after periods, and stapled.

For each of these assignments you will exchange a draft with one of your peers and edit one another's work. The “peer editing” section of your grade will reflect the quality of the feedback you provided for your partners on their rough drafts. Your grade on the final draft of your essays will include evaluation of how well you incorporated the feedback that you received.

First drafts are a great time to get creative. You want to develop your argument and reasoning. At this point, it's more important to focus on the substance of your analysis than on its presentation. Remember that this is a work-in-progress. Write with the creativity of a mind on fire. By the time you hand in the first draft, it should be fairly coherent and well-organized.

The second draft should contain a clear, logical, and rigorous analytical argument that is plainly laid-out in an explicit thesis statement in the introduction section and developed coherently and consistently in each subsequent section of the paper. Here, at this final stage the organization, flow, composition, mechanics, editing, evidence, reasoning, creativity, and formatting will be closely evaluated, with an eye to detail. Thus, your final paper should contain a clear, logical, and rigorous analytical argument that you articulate in a thesis statement in the introduction. You should develop the argument coherently and consistently in each subsequent section of the paper. You should support your argument with reasoning and evidence.

Attendance and Participation...........20% Ongoing
Peer-review....................................5% See below for due dates
Essay One, First Draft......................5% February 29
Essay One, Second Draft...................15% March 14
Essay Two, First Draft......................5% March 28
Essay Two, Second Draft...................15% April 11
Essay Three, First Draft...................5% April 18
Essay Three, Second Draft...............30% May 5 by 2pm in my box in 410 Barrows
Course Materials
A reader will be available at Replica Copy, 2138 Oxford.

*Writing for Sociology.* Department of Sociology, UC Berkeley, 2011. Our reader will not contain this material. It is available online at Berkeley Sociology Department website under “Undergraduate Resources.” It is also on our BCourses site.

Recommended Supplementary Reading


Course Schedule
Week One; January 25  Course overview

Week Two; February 1  Fundamentals of form

*Writing for Sociology.* “Preface,” “Introduction,” and Ch. 1, “Thinking and Reading for College.”


Week Three; February 8  Writing Processes

*Writing in Sociology.* Ch. 3, “The Writing Process.”


Week Four; February 15  No class

Week Five; February 22  Thesis statements

*Writing for Sociology.* Ch. 5, “Thesis Statements and Arguments.”


Week Six; February 29  Reading techniques
*First draft of Essay One due in class; bring two copies

*Writing for Sociology. Ch 2, “Understanding the Assignment” and Ch. 6, “Handling Other People’s Writing.”


Week Seven; March 7  Mezzo-mechanics: paragraphs; topic sentences; transitions.
*Peer-review due in classmate

*Writing for Sociology. Ch. 4, “Mechanics.”


Week Eight; March 14  Micro-mechanics: concision; clarity; precision.
*Second draft of Essay One due in class

*“Writing Competently” (Ch. 2). The Sociology Student Writer's Manual.


Week Nine; March 21  No Class

Week Ten; March 28  Working with theory I: technical dimensions of style
*First draft of Essay Two due in class; bring two copies

Zinsser, William. On Writing Well. ”Simplicity” (ch. 2), “Clutter” (ch. 3), “Style” (ch. 4), “Words (ch. 6), and “Usage” (ch. 7).


Week Eleven; April 4  Working with theory II; more on style  
*Peer-review due in class


Week Twelve; April 11  Technical and substantive creativity  
*Second draft of Essay Two due in class


Murray, Davis. “That's Interesting! Toward a Phenomenology of Sociology and a Sociology of Phenomenology.” Philosophy of Social Science 309-344, 1971

Week Thirteen; April 18  Embodied creativity  
*First draft of Essay Three due in class  
*Bring two copies


Week Fourteen: April 25  Writing to full fruition  
*Peer-review due in class