

Sociology 194: Social Science Writing

UC Berkeley, Fall Semester 2015

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Course Location: Thursdays, 12 noon-1 p.m. and 1 p.m.- 2 p.m., 587 Barrows
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10 a.m. -12 p.m., and by appointment, 479 Barrows.

Course Objectives: Writing, and especially academic writing, is a learned skill. Like swimming, knitting or fixing a sink, one cannot expect to be good at it without some instruction and practice. Yet, I frequently encounter students who say things such as, “I am just not a good writer” as if writing were an innate ability rather than something they have not yet learned how to do well. The purpose of this class is to challenge that unfortunately common viewpoint, and deconstruct academic writing for what it is: a process of thinking, reading, drafting, editing, and incorporating feedback from others. Everyone—even the most accomplished—can improve his or her writing. Towards that end, each student will select a research topic and over the course of the semester produce a sociological research paper. Together we will go over and through the stages of the research and especially the writing process, and you will have the experience of taking a rough idea and shaping it into a polished piece of writing that you will be proud of.

Why do this?

Hone your writing skills. The importance of writing well is clear for academic success. However, being able to write clearly and effectively in your own voice will also make you more attractive to potential employers and graduate programs. Good writing can change your life and open doors, whether the document in question is a cover letter for a resume or a love letter.

Learn about something you are interested in. Here is a chance that does not present itself everyday-- to explore a topic of your own choosing in some depth.

Learn more about Sociology. Sure, you are a Sociology or social science major, but do you know what sociologists do when they are not teaching? Being a researcher means also being a writer. The two are inextricably linked through the scientific imperative to share and publicize research findings through publication. Planning your own research project and writing it up will give you a peek into this world, and give you a sense of whether this is something you would like to pursue in the future.

Will I do actual empirical research in this class?

The answer to this question is probably a little. Given that we only have a semester for this class, there may not be enough time for you to gather and analyze the data you would need to adequately address your question. You also may not currently

have the methodological skills required to do so (such as training in how to conduct qualitative interviews, design surveys, perform statistical analyses). This is also a writing class, after all, and much of our focus will be on the writing process. However, there is much you can do. I encourage you to think of your project as developing a research proposal based on a small pilot study. That is, you can figure out how you would address your research question based on preliminary results from research you have conducted, such a survey given to a small group of people, or a few interviews, and the published work of other researchers. You can decide what methods and data sources would be best and why, and discuss what you think you would find out.

Course Materials: There are two required texts for this class that will help us break down the writing process and provide some help with the mechanics of writing. Most of what you read for this class, however, will be the research you independently conduct for your paper. You can also expect to read some short pieces that will be provided in class for an activity or discussion.

Becker, Howard. S. (1986) *Writing For Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book or Article*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press
(Purchase at the bookstore or on-line. Book is also on 2 hour reserve at Moffitt Library.)

Department of Sociology, UC Berkeley. (2008) *Writing For Sociology*. Available on-line from the department's website (under Undergraduate Program, and resouces) and also on bCourses.

Course Requirements and Due Dates:

Attendance and Participation	20% of grade	Ongoing
Paper Proposal	5% of grade	Due Sept. 17 th (week 3)
Annotated Bibliography	10% of grade	Due Oct. 1 (week 5)
Literature Review Draft	10% of grade	Due Oct. 15 (week 7)
Methods and Results Draft	10% of grade	Due Nov. 5 (week 9)
Paper Draft	15% of grade	Due Nov. 19 (week 12)
Peer Review	10% of grade	Due Dec. 3 (week 14)
Final Paper	20% of grade	Due Dec. 18 (finals week)

Attendance and Participation: The organization of our class meetings will be notably different from “lecture” courses you may be taking this semester, where you can mostly count on listening, paying attention and offering up the occasional comment or question. As this is a seminar class, I expect everyone to attend regularly, participate (as in speak) and engage in any in-class activities. I will take attendance at each class meeting.

Paper Proposal: In this assignment, you will discuss what your paper will be about. You will introduce your topic and explain why it is important and what question will you try to answer. You should also include some discussion of how you plan to address your question, i.e. how you will conduct research for the paper and any data sources you think you could use.

Annotated Bibliography and Preliminary List of Sources: An annotated bibliography includes citations of books, articles and other documents and sources, along with a brief (about 150 words or so) description of the material. (The description is the annotation, and the citation is the bibliography.) To get full credit for this assignment, designed to keep you working on tracking down the materials you will need to write your paper, you will need to annotate 5 citations. You should have at least 10 citations total in your document.

Literature Review Draft: A literature review puts your research question in context by discussing what others have already learned about it. In your draft, strive to provide an overview of the empirical work and theoretical perspectives that are most relevant to your own research, and explain the relevance of what you choose to discuss. I expect you to cite materials correctly and provide a references page. Be aware that after writing the literature review draft, you may want to revise your research question!

Methods and Results Draft: In this assignment, you will summarize the methods you used for your own empirical research, and the data and methods you would use to design a larger study to answer your question, based on your own and others' research. You will also summarize what you learned from your pilot study, and/or what you would expect to find based on the research design you described.

Rough Draft: This will be a full draft of the paper. You will include all sections of a research paper, combining your previous drafts of the literature review and methods and results sections with an introduction, conclusion, and references page. In this draft, I will expect to see revisions based on the comments you received on the sections you have previously turned in. You should aim for a draft that is about 15-20 pages long. Turn in *two* hard copies.

Peer Review Assignment: An important part of the writing process is getting comments from others about your work. We will discuss the procedures for doing this in a helpful way in class. You will review another student's rough draft and provide suggestions on how the paper could be improved, as well as what you think the author has done well. You will give these comments to the author on a worksheet provided for this purpose.

Final Paper: In your final draft, I will be looking for evidence that you incorporated my own and your peer reviewer's comments into the revision of your rough draft. You may also need to do more reading and/or additional research to back up your

claims or provide more context for your argument. The final version of your paper should be polished and edited, proofread, and as good as you can make it. The paper should be about 15-20 pages if you are taking the class for 3 units, or 20-25 pages if you are taking the class for four units. You may not turn in the same final paper for this course and another course.

Formatting: All assignments should be double-spaced, using 12-point Times New Roman, Cambria (or similar) font. Use one-inch margins, and page numbers. Please title each assignment. Your Paper Draft and Final Papers will need titles that reflect the paper's content. Scholarly materials must be cited appropriately, using the APA style that is conventional in Sociology, including a "References" page. Incorrect formatting will result in lost points on assignments.

Please keep in mind that all of the written assignments are "works in progress". For example, your final paper might end up being quite different from what you write in your initial proposal. After writing your literature review draft, you may decide to pursue a different angle of your topic. This is all for the best, and is actually a large part of what I hope you take away from this class. Making extensive changes and revisions to your written work is part of the process of writing. Your grades for the written assignments will be based both on the quality of the work you put into it initially, and also on how well you incorporate the feedback on your work that you receive from me and your peers.

Course Policies:

If you need **accommodations** for a disability or have a conflict due to the observance of religious holidays, please email or speak with me early in the semester to discuss appropriate arrangements.

Assignments must be turned in on time. If you have a personal emergency, contact me at the earliest opportunity to discuss alternative arrangements. Late assignments will be penalized one third of a grade for each day they are late (including weekends).

Incomplete Grades: Incompletes are an option of last resort for students experiencing true medical or other emergencies that make it impossible for them to complete their coursework on time. To be considered for an incomplete grade, students need to speak with me about it DURING the semester, have completed about half of the coursework, and provide documentation of the reason for the incomplete grade.

Academic honesty is expected of all students. Everyone must do their own work. Suspected violations relating to this course will be reported to the appropriate administrative department and dealt with according to university policies. *Be aware of plagiarism.* Word for word use of even a single sentence from another author, publication or website without citation is plagiarism and is considered

unethical. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade on the paper or exam with no opportunity to rewrite, as will any other kind of cheating. If you have questions about how to properly cite materials, or how to paraphrase appropriately, ask during office hours, or consult the writing guide “Writing for Sociology”, available on the Soc. department website.

Email: Email is a good way to get in touch with me, but keep in mind that I cannot always respond right away. Do not expect a response during evenings or weekends (although you may get one). It is best to ask questions about class materials and assignments before or after class or during office hours.

Office Hours: I urge students to talk with me sometime during the semester, just to say “hi” and especially if you are having trouble with the course. I can’t help you if you don’t communicate with me! There is a sign up sheet outside my office door for regular office hour appointments. You are free to drop by, but I’ll give priority to people who have appointments. If you have another class or work during my scheduled office hours, we can schedule another time to meet.

Laptops: As this is a discussion-based class, I will expect you to take notes on paper. Laptops will not be allowed in class except for specific activities, announced in advance.

Language Policy: Many of you are concurrent enrollment students, and speak languages other than English. Please use English while in class, even when speaking with one another in small groups. All written work will be in English. Think of our class meetings as a friendly place for practicing your English with other English language learners.

Grading: Part of your grade on written assignments will depend on the quality of your writing, which is linked to your fluency in English. To a great extent, your ideas are bound up in the language you use to express them. If you think this will present problems for you, please see me in office hours. Your grades will also depend on the effort you put into assignments and for the paper draft and the final draft, your revisions of previous drafts. I will be grading all assignments for this class and will always be happy to discuss the reasons for a grade with you.

Course Schedule and Readings:

Note on readings: We will discuss readings in class the week they are assigned. In other words, we will discuss Ch. 1 from Becker in class on Sept. 3, Ch. 8 on Sept. 10 and so on. To facilitate discussion, please bring your notes to class, and pick out a passage or two from the reading that you caught your attention—this could be because it sounded useful, objectionable, unintelligible, etc.

Introduction : Aug. 27th

Introduction to the class, and the class requirements.

Reading: Writing Guide, Ch. 3.8 “Expectations: Great, Good, Fair and Poor Writing”

Week 1: Sept. 3

Topics and Research Questions: What will I study? What is my question? What are the parts of a research paper?

Reading: Becker, Ch. 1, “Freshman English For Graduate Students”
Writing Guide, Introduction, Ch. 3.1

Week 2: Sept. 10

Sources (1): Finding the materials you need: searching for and evaluating materials

Reading: Becker, Ch. 8, “Terrorized by the Literature”
Writing Guide, Ch. 1

Week 3: Sept. 17

Sources (2): Library visit and presentation by Jim Ronningen, Sociology Librarian. **Important: Class today will be in 105 Doe Library! Paper Proposal due in class**

Week 4: Sept. 24

Sources (3): Writing a Literature Review or Background Section

Reading: Becker, Ch. 3, “One Right Way”
Writing Guide, Ch. 6”Handling Other People’s Writing”

Week 5: Oct. 1

Methods overview (1): What methods are available to me to answer my question?

Reading: Bring an article you plan to reference in your paper to class. (Make sure you have read it!)

Annotated Bibliography due in class

Week 6: Oct. 8

What methods make the most sense for my paper? How will I answer my question?

Reading: Bring an article about your topic to class (a different article than last week).

Week 7: Oct. 15

Data analysis and results

Reading: Bring an article about your topic to class (a different article than last week).

Literature Review Draft due in class

Week 8: Oct. 22

Components of a research paper: Writing up your research project

Reading: *Writing Guide*, Ch. 5 "Thesis Statements and Arguments"

Week 9: Oct. 29

The writing process: drafts, editing, peer review, incorporating feedback

Reading: Becker, Ch. 2, "Persona and Authority"

Writing Guide, Ch. 4 "Mechanics"

Week 10: Nov. 5

Writing mechanics and style

Reading: Becker, Ch. 4, "Editing By Ear"

Methods and Results draft due in class

Week 11: Nov. 12

No class (Keep working!) I will be available for office hours during our regular class time.

Week 12: Nov. 19

What NOT to do/Finishing the project and next steps?

Reading: Becker, Ch. 6, "Risk", and skim Ch. 7, "Getting it Out the Door"

Paper draft due in class

Week 13: Nov. 25

No class: Happy Thanksgiving

Week 14: Dec. 3

Mini-presentations, class party

Reading: Becker, Ch. 10, "A Final Word"

Peer Review assignment due in class

Final Paper Due Dec. 18th, 12 noon to my mailbox in 410 Barrows Hall. I will not accept late papers. You are welcome to hand in your paper earlier in the week.