Everybody taking this class knows how to write already. We all learn how to write essays and term papers in college, and some of us became adept at producing these on very tight deadlines. This class, however, is about scholarly writing in sociology—a very particular kind of writing. The format of an MA paper or thesis in our department is an article suitable for submission to a professional meeting. Writing this kind of article requires some very particular skills, including knowing how to:

1. Identify a field of study and research questions that allow you to contribute something new to a scholarly debate or debates.
2. Carry out a serious piece of original research, whether qualitative or quantitative.
3. Frame your study in a “literature review”—a survey of books and articles that reflect on your research questions, and link your work to a broader set of scholarly conversations.
4. Write up your findings in the format used in scholarly conference papers and journal articles.
5. Re-write and re-re-write in response to critical feedback from your colleagues.

This kind of writing can and should be more fun than the kind we learn in college, since we get to choose what we write about and find out something original and new—rather than just responding to assignments and presenting other people’s research. But it is also challenging, and the only way to learn how to do it is through practice.

In this class, we’re going to practice. I expect that most people in this class have not completed their research yet (although some of you may have). Therefore, much of our class time is going to be spent collectively talking about and giving feedback on students’ ongoing research projects. We will also be analyzing the structure of published sociological articles, producing “mini-drafts” of pieces of our own work, and commenting on the work of classmates. The final goal at the end of two semesters is to produce a draft of a paper.

**Dates, Deadlines and Benchmarks:**

This course meets approximately every other week. Although the course lasts for two semesters, students should register for the seminar in the Spring term only. The entire two-semester course is worth 3 credits.

This class is premised on making progress as a group: it only works if everybody in the class is **more or less** at the same stage in the research/writing process. “More or less” does not mean “exactly”; however, it does mean that everybody needs to adhere to a few very basic deadlines and benchmarks, which include the following:

1. To join the class in the fall, you must have a draft of a research proposal, and to have begun research or be ready to begin research immediately. You also
need to have an advisor with whom you are working on your research project, and with whom you are in regular contact. If you are carrying out an interview-based research project and have not yet submitted to IRB, you should do so before the first day of class.

2. All students are required to develop a seminar contract at the beginning of the semester outlining deadlines and benchmarks that you intend to meet, to be shared with the class as a whole. At the end of the semester, you will debrief with the class on your meeting (or failure to meet) these self-scheduled deadlines and benchmarks.

3. To continue (and register for) the class in the spring, you must be well along in your research and hand in a rough draft of your article introduction, with accompanying bibliography, by January 10.

Grading:

Students will be graded on the drafts of their research papers submitted at the end of the Spring term. All completed drafts will receive a grade of “A,” with the following exception: students are allowed to miss one class session per year with no grade penalty. After that, students will be penalized a half-grade per class missed (i.e., if you miss 2 class sessions, you get an A-minus, a B-plus for 3 class sessions missed, and so on).

Schedule, Fall 2011

September 7: No class. Homework due by 8 a.m.: draft of a seminar contract outlining your overall objectives for the end of the semester, a breakdown of steps you will take to achieve those objectives, and a timeline for achieving them.

September 14: Class meeting. Homework due by 8 a.m, the day before: a response to your fellow students’ research proposals.

September 21: No class. Individual meetings.

September 28: Class meeting. Guest speaker. In-class progress reports. Homework due by 8 a.m. the day before: an article from a scholarly journal that you like and/or find useful (send me the PDF); and a final seminar contract (to be shared with the rest of the class).

October 5: No class.

October 12: Class meeting. Figuring out what your research is “about.” In-class review of online databases. Homework due by 8 a.m. the day before: a minimum 400-word response to Chapters 1 and 4 of Luker, Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences.

October 19: No class.
October 26: In-class progress reports. Homework due by 8 a.m. the day before: an analysis of the structure of four scholarly articles.

November 2: No class.

November 9: In-class progress reports. In-class review of RefWorks. Homework due by 8 a.m. the day before: a minimum 3 page (double-spaced) research memo (e-mailed to both me and to your advisor) detailing the progress you have made in your research, interesting findings, compelling quotes, etc.

November 16: No class

November 23: No class

November 30: In-class progress reports. Homework due by 8 a.m., the day before: response to Luker Chapter 5, including Chapter 5 exercise (you can leave a hard copy in my box for this one).

December 7: Class meeting. In-class contract debriefings. Homework due by 8 a.m.: a revised literature review, including a minimum 10-item bibliography of scholarly books/articles, including at least three items not on your research proposal bibliography, indicated in **bold**.

Draft of article introduction due by January 10, 2012.

**Schedule, Spring 2012: To Be Announced.**