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.

**Texts**

Belcher, Wendy. 2009. *Writing your journal article in 12 weeks: a guide to academic publishing success*. [This book is on reserve at the BC library. I will provide scans of a few sections next semester. You do not need to purchase it, but I suggest looking at the copy in the library.]
**Deadlines**
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, 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 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.

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).

**Weekly Schedule, Fall 2012**

**Week 1. Sept 6th**
No class.

Homework #1 due by 8 a.m:
- Post your current research proposal to Blackboard.

**Week 2. Sept 13th**
Class meeting.
- Discuss contracts
- Discuss research proposals
- Q & A about the research process

Homework #2 due by 8 a.m, the **day before class:**
1. Draft 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. Detailed guidelines at the end of the syllabus. Submit to me by email.

2. A response to your fellow students’ research proposals, available on Blackboard. Detailed guidelines at the end of the syllabus. Post your response on Blackboard, also be prepared to share your reviews in class.

3. A list of at least 2 questions that you hope to have clarified by this course. Please post on Blackboard. There are many things about the research process with become taken-for-granted by faculty, but may be less obvious to students. So this is your chance to make me aware of any issues – big or small – that are on your mind. We will discuss these questions in class.

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Week 3. Sept 20

No class.

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Week 4. Sept 27

Class meeting.
- In-class progress reports
- Discuss articles (from HW #3)

Homework #3 due by 8 a.m. the **day before class**:  
1. Find two articles from scholarly journals: one that you like and/or find useful and one that you think is bad. Post the PDFs to Blackboard, also be prepared to discuss in class.

2. A finalized seminar contract. Detailed guidelines at the end of the syllabus. (Bring paper copy to class, to be shared with the rest of the class).

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Week 5. Oct 4

No class.

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Week 6. Oct 11

Class meeting.
- In-class progress reports
- Review of ways to organize qualitative data [Guest speaker: Emilie Dubois]
- Discussion of article structure analysis

Homework #4 due by 8 a.m. the day before class:

1. An analysis of the structure of four scholarly articles. Detailed guidelines at the end of the syllabus. Post to Blackboard, also be prepared to share in class.

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Week 7. Oct 18

No class.
Week 8. Oct 25
Class meeting.
- Figuring out what your research is “about.” [Guest speaker: Sarah Babb]
- In-class review of online databases.

Homework #5 due by 8 a.m. the day before class:
1. A minimum 400-word response to Chapters 1 and 4 of Luker, *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences*. Post to Blackboard, also be prepared to share in class.

Week 9. Nov 1
No class.

Homework #6 due by 8 a.m.:
1. 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. Post to blackboard.

Week 10. Nov 8
Class meeting. MEET IN ONIELL 307 (Library classroom)
- Introduction to RefWorks. [at library]
- In-class progress reports (from HW #6 and HW #7)

Homework #7 due by 8 a.m., the day before class:
1. A response to your fellow students’ research memos (available on Blackboard). Post to Blackboard, also be prepared to share in class.

Week 11. Nov 15
No class

Week 12. Nov 22
No class

Week 13. Nov 29
Class meeting.
- In-class progress reports
- Discussion of Luker
- Discussion of grants [Guest speaker: Autumn Green]

Homework #8 due by 8 a.m., the day before class:
1. A response to Luker Chapter 5, including Chapter 5 exercise. Post to Blackboard, also be prepared to share in class.
Week 14. Dec 6

Class meeting.
- In-class contract debriefings
- Discussion of literature reviews

Homework #9 due by 8 a.m.:
  1. 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**. Post to Blackboard, also be prepared to share in class.

**Draft of article introduction due by January 10, 2012 (to continue and register for the class in the spring)!**
HOMEWORK #2 GUIDELINES PART 1: Seminar Contract

A major goal of the writing seminar this semester is for you to produce a draft of your paper introduction by January 10, 2013. This will be your “admission ticket” to register for the seminar second semester.

A draft is just a draft, most of academic writing is rewriting, and you will revise your introduction a number of times before arriving at the final product. However, even a preliminary draft needs to be based on an informed sense of what your research is “about” and how might contribute to scholarly discussions (this is more difficult for qualitative researchers engaging in inductive research, less difficult for quantitative researchers beginning with clear hypotheses). To this end, you are going to need to work very hard on three things this fall:

1. Getting your research underway.

2. Getting and staying in touch with your advisor and other faculty members who can give you advice on your project.

3. Seeking out and reading scholarly articles and books that help you understand what your contribution to scholarly discussions is going to be.

By writing up this seminar contract, you are laying out a realistic plan for what you intend to accomplish by the end of the semester, and how you intend to get there. Your contract should include an introductory narrative and a timeline. In December, you will “debrief” with the class on whether you were able to meet your goals and benchmarks according to the contract. Below are some more specific guidelines:

1. Your introductory narrative should begin with a one- or two-paragraph description of what kind of research you will be conducting this semester. What are you interested in finding out, and how are you going to go about it? Where are you in the research process? Then you should elaborate on the biggest challenges you face. For example, what are your time constraints? If you are doing interview-based research, do you expect to have a lot of trouble finding subjects? What are some other problems that you expect to encounter? Then you should briefly discuss how you plan to make time this semester for working on your project. What days of the week and times of day can you set aside for interviewing (if appropriate), data cleaning (if appropriate), transcribing, reading, and taking notes?

2. Your timeline should include a list of incremental, benchmark goals you intend to accomplish by December 2, including specific dates by which you plan to accomplish these. You may include overall course deadlines, but you should also include your own individually-tailored deadlines. Examples would include: by X date, I will have contacted 8 potential subjects; by X date, I will have had the first (or second, or third) meeting with my advisor, or with another faculty member; by X date, I will have completed 2 interviews, and so on.
HOMEWORK #2 GUIDELINES PART 2: Proposal Reviews
1. Read the SSRC’s “The Art of Writing Proposals” available at
http://www.ssrc.org/publications/view/7A9CB4F4-815F-DE11-BD80-001CC477EC70/

2. While your proposals will not be reviewed by outside funding agencies, the SSRC guide is a
standard for proposal writing. Write up reviews of the research proposals posted on
Blackboard by your classmates, using the SSRC guide to evaluate the proposals.

In your review, point out
   1. What was good about the proposal,
   2. what needs improvement (be polite!), and
   3. at least two suggestions on how to improve the proposal.

Post your reviews on Blackboard. Also, be prepared to discuss these reviews in class. We will
discuss each proposal in class, and each student will provide verbal feedback on their
classmate’s proposals.

This process is meant to be helpful, not mean. You are learning not only to write up our own
work, but also to be good colleagues. This means that you must learn to frame your criticisms in
terms that are polite and helpful. A good rule is to follow any critique with a suggestion for
improvement or an alternative research/writing strategy.

HOMEWORK #3 GUIDELINES: Articles and Finalized Contract
1. Find an article from a scholarly journal that you like and/or find useful. Post PDF on
Blackboard.

2. Find an article from a scholarly journal that you dislike and/or find poorly executed. Post PDF
on Blackboard.

3. The second seminar contract should cover the following:
   1. A one- or two-paragraph description of what you've accomplished in your
      project so far (including what you've done since our last class meeting).
   2. A narrative on how you plan to get everything done that you need to have
      completed a draft of your paper by the middle of May. Discuss the challenges that
      you face, including time constraints, problems with getting data, etc. What days of
      the week and times of day can you set aside for interviewing (if appropriate), data
      cleaning (if appropriate), transcribing, reading, and taking notes?
   3. A timeline, which should include a list of incremental, benchmark goals you
      intend to accomplish by the middle of May, including specific dates by which you
      plan to accomplish these. You may include overall course deadlines, but you
      should also include your own individually-tailored deadlines.
HOMEWORK #4 GUIDELINES: Article Analysis

Analyze the structure of the four scholarly articles listed below. For each article:

1. Assess the usefulness of the titles and keywords?
2. Identify the research question or questions. Where are they located?
3. Create an outline of the introductory sections (i.e., each section before the findings are presented), with a description of the apparent function of each section.
4. Briefly discuss how the author(s) organize and present their findings.
5. Briefly discuss what the author(s) are doing in the conclusion.
6. Assess how well these parts “fit together” into a cohesive storyline.
7. Identify any missing information, as well as anything that could have been left out of the article.

Then briefly discuss what is similar about the structure (i.e., not the content) of the different articles and what is different.

ARTICLES:


The 3rd and 4th articles should be those you identified in Homework #3.