PROFESSIONAL WRITING FOR SOCIOLOGISTS (FALL 2021)
Sociology 875
Wednesday 9:00am – 12:00pm
120 Conrad A. Elvehjem Building
University of Wisconsin, Madison

Instructor: Michael Light, PhD, Associate Professor of Sociology
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Office Hours: Monday 2-3pm & appointment (in-person or via Skype @ michael.t.light)
Email: mlight@ssc.wisc.edu
Instructional Mode: Face-to-Face
Canvas site: https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/266918

Credits: 3. This class meets for 1 three-hour class period each week over the fall/spring semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, studying, etc) for about 3 hours out of classroom for every class period. The syllabus includes more information about meeting times and expectations for student work.

Course Description

The overarching goal of this course is to prepare you to write effectively for social science journals. While other graduate courses are geared towards developing the tools to conduct social science research, this course takes a detailed look into *how to publish your research*. To this end, we will comprehensively examine multiple facets of the publication process: how to frame an idea, how to craft an argument, how to review a manuscript, how to edit a manuscript, and how to successfully respond to reviewers and editors. In doing so, you will develop a much stronger sense of how to package your work, write clearly and persuasively, review articles, and identify good social science.

In preparing this course, I draw from my publication experiences at multiple social science journals (*American Sociological Review, American Journal of Sociology, Social Forces, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, etc.) as well as the publication experiences of my colleagues. This approach provides an opportunity to see behind the curtain of the publication process. How was this manuscript initially received? What was our response? Was there a 2nd round of revisions? How did the new reviewers respond? What was the eventual decision?

Learning Objectives

What can you expect to take away from this course?
- A principal aim of this course is to <u>enhance your scientific sensibilities</u> without paralyzing you when it comes to your own research. Social research can be difficult. The trick is to develop a sense of standards that are neither too permissive nor too nihilistic. You should look upon your graduate career as an opportunity for learning to walk this tightrope.

- Practical advice on <u>how best to package your own research</u>. Concretely, you should leave this course with a publishable paper – or at least good ideas for how to make your manuscript publishable.
- A <u>better understanding of how the review process works</u> – what happens after you submit your paper; what to expect from the editor's decision letter. Along these lines, you should also gain a better understanding of what editors and reviewers are looking for in a journal manuscript, and a better understanding of how to respond to reviewers' criticisms when you are invited to resubmit.
- <u>Good reviewing skills</u> – what a good review looks like and how to go about writing one.
- An <u>expansion of your sociological horizon</u> through exposure to different substantive areas, methodologies, and styles of work.

Course Prerequisites

The price of admission to this course is a piece of your own writing (20-50 pages) that you believe contains a sufficient contribution to social knowledge that it deserves to be published – and therefore must be rewritten. *The paper may have coauthors* – other students, faculty, etc. (If you have coauthors, you should let them know that the paper will be discussed in the course.) Many students will want to rework their MS thesis; others will want to continue work on a manuscript they started for another course. The criterion for a journal manuscript is that it must advance our knowledge in some way – a literature review won't do.

Required Materials

This course emphasizes learning by doing. Thus, much of our focus will be on reviewing and writing. Still, we will draw from various readings throughout. All articles will be available on Canvas, but I will also draw from the Becker, Firebaugh, and Pinker texts (below) on occasion.

Becker, Howard S. 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
Firebaugh, Glenn. 2008. *Seven Rules for Social Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Pinker, Steven. 2014. *The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person's Guide to Writing in the 21st Century*. New York: Penguin Books.

Course Grading
Your grade is based three main components: writing assignments, class discussion, and a final paper and response memo.

Writing Assignments 50%
Final Paper & Memo 30%
Class Discussion   20%

<u>Grading</u>: The standard UW grading scale will be used.

Total Percent	Grade	Total Percent	Grade
93-100	A	70-76.99	C

87-92.99	AB	60-69.99	D
83-86.99	B	<60	F
77-82.99	BC		

Writing Assignments: There are three types of writing assignments in this course (submitted on Canvas and in class). **First**, you will write reviews for your classmates' manuscripts (the number of reviews will depend on the number of students). Typically you will review one paper each week but I ask that you also read the papers you are not reviewing so you can contribute to class discussion. Peer review is at the heart of advancing academic knowledge and an important aspect of an academic career is to evaluate the contributions of submitted manuscripts. To help socialize you into this role, I will provide an array of my prior reviews as guides.

Second, you will write reviews for papers that have previously been submitted for publication. We will ask four key questions about each article: What do we like about the manuscript (strengths)? What do we dislike (weaknesses)? What suggestions do we have – substantive and stylistic – for revising the manuscript? Is it publishable? Class discussion is organized around those questions. After the discussion of the previously submitted papers, I will distribute the reviewers' comments along with the editor's decision letter, which we then discuss and compare with our own reviews and publication recommendations. By evaluating others we learn the qualities that separate good and bad papers. By playing the role of reviewer, and comparing our reviews with the actual reviews as well as the reviews of others in the course, we learn what reviewers are looking for in a journal article.

Third, after discussing the reviewer's comments, we will write response memos based on the second round submission materials. This will provide a sense of what a successful resubmission looks like – the cover letter back to the editor, the organization and content of the memorandum detailing how we revised the manuscript in light of the reviewers' comments, pointers on how to "key" the cover memorandum to the altered portions of the manuscript, and so on.

Final Paper and Memo: During this course you will receive a minimum of 2-3 written reviews of your article as well as verbal feedback during class. Your final paper will be a revised version of your manuscript based on the reviews/feedback received. In addition to the revised manuscript, you will submit a memo detailing how you responded to the reviews. These items are due the last day of class, **Dec. 15, 2021**.

Class Discussion: The success of the class will depend on lively discussions and the sharing of ideas, so we all should come to the seminar having completed the readings and ready to contribute our thoughts. Thus, the final portion of your grade is based on your thoughtful contributions and questions in class meetings.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1: Introduction (Sept. 8)
- Introduction of the class, your papers, and your goals for this course. You must send me a blinded copy of your paper by **Sept. 22, 2021**

Week 2: Choosing Topics and Framing Ideas (Sept. 15)

Readings
Firebaugh, Chapter 1 "There Should be the Possibility of Surprise in Social Research"
Pinker, Chapter 1 "Good Writing: Reverse-Engineering Good Prose as the Key to Developing a
    Writerly Ear"

Assignment
- Choose an article from *ASR* or *AJS* that you think does a good job at framing the research question(s) and provide the citation in the Canvas "Discussion" thread by Monday evening (Sept. 13th). Be prepared to discuss the article and why you chose it.

Week 3: Effective Writing and Presenting Data (Sept. 22)

Readings
Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists*, Chapter 5 "Learning to write as a professional."
Warren et al. 2021. "Marketing Ideas: How to Write Research Articles that Readers Understand
    and Cite." *Journal of Marketing* 1-16.
Healy, Kieran and James Moody. 2014. "Data Visualization in Sociology." *Annual Review of
    Sociology* 40: 105-28.
LaRossa, Ralph 2012 "Writing and Reviewing Manuscripts in the Multidimensional World of
    Qualitative Research." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 74: 643 – 659
Pinker, Steven. 2014. "Why Academics Stink at Writing." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
    (Recommended)

Week 4: Peer Review I (Sept. 29)

Readings
Miller et al. 2013. "How to be a Peer Reviewer: A Guide for Recent and Soon-to-be PhDs." *PS:
    Political Science & Politics* 46(1): 120-123
Example reviews (available on Canvas in Week 4 folder)

Assignment
- 1st peer review due (I will send out assignments for each student)

Week 5: Peer Review II (Oct. 6)

Assignment
- 2nd peer review due (I will send out assignments for each student)

Week 6: Peer Review III (Oct. 13)

Assignment
- 3rd peer review due (I will send out assignments for each student)

Week 7: Review of Submitted Manuscript I (Oct. 20)

Assignment
- Write review for 1st submitted manuscript (available on Canvas in Week 7 folder)

Week 8: Review of Submitted Manuscript II (Oct. 27)

Assignment
- Write review for 2nd submitted manuscript (available on Canvas in Week 8 folder)

Week 9: Review of Submitted Manuscript III (Nov. 3)

Assignment
- Write review for 3rd submitted manuscript (available on Canvas in Week 9 folder)

Week 10: Responding to Reviewers & Editors I (Nov. 10)

Assignment
- Write *outline* for how you would respond to reviewers of 1st submitted manuscript

Week 11: Responding to Reviewers & Editors II (Nov. 17)

Assignment
- Write *response memo* for 2nd submitted manuscript based on the revised manuscript (available on Canvas in Week 11 folder)

Week 12: THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY (NO CLASS)

Week 13: Responding to Reviewers & Editors III (Dec. 1)

Assignment
- Write *response memo* for 3rd submitted manuscript based on the revised manuscript (available on Canvas in Week 13 folder)

Week 14: Writing Grants (Dec. 8)

Readings
- Read two examples of funded grants (available on Canvas in the Week 14 folder)

Week 15: Data Sharing (Dec. 15)

Readings
Freese, Jeremy. 2007. "Replication Standards for Quantitative Social Science: Why Not Sociology? *Sociological Methods & Research* 36(2): 153-172.
Lubet, Steven. 2018. *Interrogating Ethnography*, Conclusion "Toward Evidence-Based Ethnography." (available on Canvas in Week 15 folder)

Participating IF in-person classes are suspended
In the case of a suspension of in-person classes at UW-Madison, classes will be held entirely via **Zoom**. When you go on Canvas, there is a tab on the left side that says "Zoom." There you will see our planned sessions. These classes will be held on the same day and time as our normal class meetings (Wednesdays, 9am-12pm).

Teaching & Learning Data Transparency Statement
The privacy and security of faculty, staff and students' personal information is a top priority for UW-Madison. The university carefully evaluates and vets all campus-supported digital tools used to support teaching and learning, to help support success through learning analytics, and to enable proctoring capabilities. View the university's full teaching and learning data transparency statement.

Privacy of Student Records & the Use of Audio Recorded Lectures Statement
Lecture materials and recordings for this course are protected intellectual property at UW-Madison. Students in this course may use the materials and recordings for their personal use related to participation in this class. Students may also take notes solely for their personal use. If a lecture is not already recorded, you are not authorized to record my lectures without my permission unless you are considered by the university to be a qualified student with a disability requiring accommodation. [Regent Policy Document 4-1] Students may not copy or have lecture materials and recordings outside of class, including posting on internet sites or selling to commercial entities. Students are also prohibited from providing or selling their personal notes to anyone else or being paid for taking notes by any person or commercial firm without the instructor's express written permission. Unauthorized use of these copyrighted lecture materials and recordings constitutes copyright infringement and may be addressed under the university's policies, UWS Chapters 14 and 17, governing student academic and non-academic misconduct.

See more information about privacy of student records and the usage of audio-recorded lectures.

Digital Course Evaluation (AEFIS)
UW-Madison uses a digital course evaluation survey tool called AEFIS. For this course, you will receive an official email two weeks prior to the end of the semester, notifying you that your course evaluation is available. In the email you will receive a link to log into the course evaluation with your NetID. Evaluations are anonymous. Your participation is an integral component of this course, and your feedback is important to me. I strongly encourage you to participate in the course evaluation.

Students' Rules, Rights & Responsibilities

Diversity & Inclusion Statement
Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming

and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

Academic Integrity Statement
By virtue of enrollment, each student agrees to uphold the high academic standards of the University of Wisconsin-Madison; academic misconduct is behavior that negatively impacts the integrity of the institution. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these previously listed acts are examples of misconduct which may result in disciplinary action. Examples of disciplinary action include, but is not limited to, failure on the assignment/course, written reprimand, disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Statement
The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (UW-855) require the university to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities to access and participate in its academic programs and educational services. Faculty and students share responsibility in the accommodation process. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations during the beginning of the semester, or as soon as possible after being approved for accommodations. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to provide reasonable instructional and course-related accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. (See: McBurney Disability Resource Center)

Academic Calendar & Religious Observances