

There is no great writing, only great rewriting.

L. Brandeis

The first draft of anything is shit.

E. Hemingway

Class Meets: Thursday, 1-340

Fall 2015

Writing for Sociologists

Soc 703

Lee Clarke

lee@leeclarke.com

The course is practically, not theoretically, oriented. That is, the main requirements are: write, write, write, edit, edit, edit, share, share, share.

It's strange to find sociologists thinking about writing as if it weren't a social thing. The image is that of a lone creator, locked away in a musty, or beautiful, office or perhaps, if you envision Karl Marx in the basement of some library, hammering away at the keyboard emerging, finally one day, with a complete manuscript. The image is utter fantasy. For even if someone were to lock themselves away for a day, or a week, and actually produce a manuscript at the end they would not be alone. The audience is always with you, even if you don't explicitly conceptualize it. And that, all by itself, makes writing inherently, unalterably, ineluctably *social*. That writing is social has enormous implications for what and how we produce. The basic building block of this course is the sociality of writing. All else will revolve around this main theme. Details will follow.

I have a set of *recommended* readings, and I do mean recommended. That is, it would be nice and good if you read one or two or some or all of them and we can talk about some of the issues as they arise. It would also be nice for you to read, and suggest for the class to read, other things you've found helpful. I've found many useful practical, theoretical, and moral prescriptions in these readings, but I won't require them because when you're reading you're not writing. And we all want to write. There is nothing else.

There are several aspects to the course's structure (some of this will change because a lot depends on how many people are in the class):

1. Each person will distribute a paper, or a chapter, a week before a class. (Hence, having a draft of a sociology paper already in hand is a prerequisite of this course.) Everyone in the class will respond *in writing* to the author. If you wish to make additional comments on the paper you may. But that is no substitute for detailed, considered comments. Then we will talk about the criticisms and other issues during class (where other issues = everything from split

infinitives to the issue of sociological importance). The details of all this we'll work out the first class period. So, for example:

Student A posts a paper on Sakai for Week 2 of class that will meet Week 3. Student A should have this paper to us *no later* than the Tuesday before Student A is scheduled to present. We all then comment, in writing, on the paper and a separate sheet. The comments on the paper itself should be about minor things ("vague"; "nice example", etc.). The comments on the separate sheet should be about major things and you should post those on Sakai. What we're aiming for here is to have a lot of commentary, and we all see each other's commentary. We'll all get better and better at identifying weak and strong points in a paper, and at writing generally.

Week 3 comes and we all bring our copies of the paper and the comments to class for discussion. We go through the big criticisms and suggestions, talking about the issues. In addition, perhaps we bring up some issues we've read about in the recommended reading.

2. In addition, there are many issues that I especially want us to attend to, and I intend to bring up these issues throughout the semester. A partial list: terse vs. discursive styles, using irony, effective arguing, writing for trade and academic audiences, journal and book reviewing (an important part of the writing enterprise), and the politics of publishing. I've put a few readings on here; they're (almost) all short pieces

Please buy William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White, *Elements of Style*, 4th edition. Or use [this link](#).

Student learning goals and assessment

My learning goals for the course are to encourage more and better writing by graduate students. I also hope to impart some sense of what writing is like for the working sociologist. The way I will assess whether you and I have met these goals is that I will judge the quality of your input into other people's papers, the quality of progress on your own paper, and your level of participation in the class.

Week

1. Sept 3

1. Introductions, overview, your paper, your goals, my goals
2. How to constructively criticize
3. The Frederick Winslow Taylor assignment
4. Organization of presentations

Reading:

- Clarke, How to write critical essays

- Read some entries from the following URL. Read whatever you want but be sure to include, Becker, Molotch, and Reinharz. Read them all if you can.
<http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/13630>

2. Sept 10

1. Reports from students on Taylor assignment
2. Choose two journals as a potential home for your paper. Using one paragraph for each journal describe your paper's possible fit.
3. Ruminations on writing

Reading:

- <http://www.jamesmjasper.org/Writing.html>
- Jasper, Why so many academics are lousy writers
- Jasper, How the research-university model has killed the creativity of humanists and social scientists
- Mills, On Intellectual Craftsmanship
- Erikson, On Sociological Writing
- How to write good

Presenter(s):

3. Sept 17

1. Journal publishing
2. By Tuesday before this class, post so Sakai "information for authors" and the list of editors (sometimes called associate editors) from the journals you've identified. We will discuss the issues in class.

Reading:

- Jefferson, Declaration of independence
- Marx, Of methods and manners for aspiring sociologists
- Holstein, On article writing

Presenter(s):

4. Sept 24

Books, Dissertations, Proposals

Reading:

- Clarke, On proposing a dissertation
- Garber, Why can't young scholars write their second books first?
- Dougherty, Trade books can be scholarly, too
- SSRC, On proposal writing
- Toor, The reality of writing a good book proposal

Presenter(s):

5. Oct 1

Outlining, work plans, execution

Reverse outlining

Reading

- Golden-Biddle & Locke, Appealing work

Presenter(s):

6. Oct 8

Problem formation

Reading:

- Davis, That's Interesting

Presenter(s):

7. Oct 15

Random reading:

- Rosenfield, how to read
- Moore, How to read

Presenter(s):

8. Oct 22

Presenter(s):

9. Oct 29

Presenter(s):

10. Nov 5

Random reading:

- What are you working on next?

Presenter(s):

11. Nov 12

Presenter(s):

12. Nov 19

Presenter(s):

13. Dec 3

Presenter(s):]

14. Dec 10

Presenter(s):

Recommended Readings

- Howard Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists*.
- Steven King, *On Writing*.
- Jacques Barzun, *On Writing, Editing, and Publishing*, University of Chicago Press, 1971.
- Jacques Barzun and Henry Graff, *The Modern Researcher*, NY: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1962.
- Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Reader Over Your Shoulder*, 2nd edition, NY: Vintage, 1979.
- Laurel Richardson, *Writing Strategies: Reaching Diverse Audiences*, Qualitative Research Methods Series Vol. 21, Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990.
- William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*, Harper Collins, 1990.

The Rutgers Sociology Department strives to create an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all manifestations, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, disability status, region/country of origin, and political orientation. We also celebrate diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives among our faculty and students and seek to create an atmosphere of respect and mutual dialogue. We have zero tolerance for violations of these principles and have instituted clear and respectful procedures for responding to such grievances.

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