

Empirical Research in the Social Sciences: Design, Implementation and Write-up

Graduate School for Social Research

2019-2020

Course Description

This course focuses on the logic of theory-driven and empirically-based social science research and the process underlying scientific production. We emphasize the practical steps that enable scholars to design their research project, formulate testable hypotheses, and select the data and analysis techniques most suitable for answering the project's research question(s). Equally important, the course teaches you how to read published academic studies to critically assess their merits and limitations, and how to write up research projects to meet the requirements and expectations of major English-language social science publication outlets, especially those of peer-reviewed journals like the *American Sociological Review*, *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, *Social Forces*, and the *European Sociological Review*.

To this end, the course comprises two independent, albeit complimentary, components, which follow one another during the 2019-2020 academic year. Part I of the course, to take place in Autumn 2019, teaches students the practicalities of moving from research design to research implementation. Part II, to be held in Spring 2020, focuses on reading and writing social science publications.

The entire course is conducted from an interdisciplinary perspective. Below are the detailed descriptions for **Part I, *Research Design and Implementation in Social Science*** (30 hours, Semester I) and **Part II, *Reading and Writing in Social Science*** (30 Hours, Semester II), including timeline and requirements specific to each of the course's components.

Part II: Reading and Writing in the Social Sciences (30 hours, Semester II)

Instructors: Joshua K. Dubrow and Iona Wyszynski
Place: Room 232, Staszic Palace, 72 Nowy Swiat, 00-330 Warsaw, Poland
Time: Mondays and Fridays, 11:00 – 13:00
Course Website: socialinquiry.wordpress.com
Email: jdubrow2000@gmail.com, iona.wyszynski@ifispan.waw.pl
Office Hours: By appointment for office meetings. We are also available via e-mail.

Description

At the heart of academic social science are theory-informed empirical research articles and constructive criticism on the pre-publication writing of colleagues. Part II of the 'Empirical Research in the Social Sciences' course trains students in how to read and write English language social science empirical research articles that conform to international standards. By article, we mean that which is found in the top journals of sociology, e.g. generalist journals such as *American Sociological Review* (Impact Factor 5.39), *Social Forces* (IF 2.29), and *European Sociological Review* (IF 2.76), and specialty journals such as *Qualitative Research* (IF 3.14). These articles have ca. 8000-9000 words and tend to follow a similar structure: Title, abstract, acknowledgements, introduction, theory and hypotheses, data and methods, results, conclusion, and references. Other sections depend on the methods and content of the empirical analyses, such as "setting" (for qualitative articles) and appendices.

Students will need to understand both the structure of empirical research articles and the kind of content that should be included within each part of the structure. They will write based on their own research, with the opportunity to draw from Part I of the course. They will also learn how to revise both their own writing and the writing of their colleagues.

Objectives

Part II aims to provide students the key skills for how to read and write for the top English language sociology journals. At the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand the structure of empirical research articles
- Understand the content of each section of empirical research articles
- Critically assess the structure and content of empirical social science research
- Gain experience in writing each section of a theory-informed, empirically-based article
- Develop useful writing strategies and habits
- Revise their own writing
- Provide constructive criticism on the writing of colleagues
- Understand how to present and promote their research results

Part II promotes critical thinking and communication skills in addition to this specialized knowledge. By the end of the semester, you should be able to present your written work to a scholarly audience or the lay public in clear, logical fashion.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Class Participation (20%): Students are expected to have read the book chapters and articles that we will discuss with a focus on the particular section or sections due for that day. In classes where writing is due, students are expected to have prepared in advance the constructive criticism of their colleagues' writing.

Writing Text for Colleagues to Constructively Critique (40%): For four class periods, students will write in advance a short text (ca. 300 – 500 words) that is to be submitted to a colleague and to the instructors. Each assignment corresponds to a major structural element of empirical research papers: (1) introduction and research questions, (2) theory and hypotheses, (3) data and methods, and (4) conclusions. **Writing assignment is due two working days before the class. Peer review is due one working day before the class.**

Writing Text for the Instructors to Constructively Critique (30%): At the end of the course, students will submit to the instructor several sections of an empirical research draft paper (preferably one that they have written and revised throughout the course), 2000 words, **due May 22, 2020**. Details pertaining to the content and structure of this assignment will be handed out in class.

Summarizing Chapters in “How to Write” Books (10%): For three class periods, students will submit to the instructor a short summary (min. 200 words) of selected chapters in Schimel (2012). The summary is to function as notes about what the chapter attempts to convey with a focus on what is most important. This is not a space for personal reflections. Rather, it is a means of reference and a demonstration that you understood the chapter. **Summary is due on the day of the class.**

Readings

(a) Articles from the top journals in sociology TBA

(b) On writing:

Required

Schimel, Joshua. 2012. *Writing Science: How to Write Papers That Get Cited and Proposals That Get Funded*. Oxford University Press.

Lebrun, J. L. 2011. *Scientific writing 2.0: a reader and writer's guide*. New Jersey: World Scientific

NB: Chapters will be available in the GSSR library and ERSS Google Drive folder

Optional

The Academic Phrasebank, The University of Manchester, phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk

Joshua Schimel's blog on writing science: <https://schimelwritingscience.wordpress.com/>

Online academic writing courses for non-native speakers of English:

<https://www.edx.org/course/how-to-write-an-essay>

<http://aeo.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/>

Hilary Glasman-Deal (2010) *Science Research Writing For Non-Native Speakers of English*. Imperial College London: UK.

Part II - Course Outline

Class 1: February 24

A. Introduction to the Course; Expectations of Academic Audiences

Guetzkow, Joshua, Michèle Lamont and Grégoire Mallard. 2004. "What Is Originality in the Humanities and the Social Sciences?" *American Sociological Review* 69(2): 190-212.

Davis, Murray S. 1971. "That's Interesting: Towards a Phenomenology of Sociology and Sociology of Phenomenology." *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 1(4).

B. The General Structure of Empirical Research Articles

Schimel (2012) Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4

Class 2: March 2

What Gets Published in the Top Journals? Topics and Structures of Articles in the Top Journals

This is an in-class exercise in which we examine articles from the top journals in sociology. We will provide the articles.

Class 3: March 6

A. Writing Strategies and Writing Habits

Smith, Chris. 2018. "Six academic writing habits that will boost productivity." *LSE Impact Blog*
<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2018/03/09/six-academic-writing-habits-that-will-boost-productivity/>

Peterson, Todd C., Sofie R. Kleppner, and Crystal M. Botham. 2018. "Ten simple rules for scientists: Improving your writing productivity" *Plos*
<https://journals.plos.org/ploscompbiol/article?id=10.1371/journal.pcbi.1006379>

B. How to Provide Constructive Criticism

Online book: *Give your students better writing feedback. A practical guide for instructors.*
<http://www.betterwritingfeedback.com/>

Class 4: March 9

Summary 1 (ca. min 200 words) of Schimel (2012) Chapter 5

How to Write the Introduction

Schimel (2012) Chapters 5 and 6

Class 5: March 16

Writing assignment 1 (ca. 300 – 500 words): Introduction

Peer review 1 (in-text comments)

How to Write the Theory and Hypotheses

Schimel (2012) Chapter 7

Class 6: March 20

Summary 2 (ca. min 200 words) of Schimel (2012) Chapter 10

How to Write the Data, Methods, and Results of Quantitative Empirical Research

Zigerell, L. J. 2013. “Rookie Mistakes: Preemptive Comments on Graduate Student Empirical Research Manuscripts.” *PS: Political Science and Politics* January: 142 – 146.

Schimel (2012) Chapters 8 and 10

Class 7: March 23

Writing assignment 2 (ca. 300 – 500 words): Theory and Hypotheses

Peer review 2 (in-text comments)

How to Prepare Tables and Figures: Tips for Data Visualizations in Articles and Academic Posters

Lebrun (2011) Chapter 15

Optional: Grant, R. (2019). *Data visualization: charts, maps, and interactive graphics*. Boca Raton, Florida: CRC Press: pp. 21-38

Class 8: March 30

Writing assignment 3 (ca. 300 – 500 words): Data and Methods

Peer review 3 (in-text comments)

How to Write the Conclusion

Schimel (2012) Chapters 9, 11, and 18

Class 9: April 3

How to Write the Title and Abstract

Schimel (2012) Chapters 13 and 14

Lebrun (2011) Chapters 10 and 11

Class 10: April 6

Summary 3 (ca. min 200 words) of Schimel (2012) Chapter 17

A. How to Write the Setting and Appendices & B. How to Write Acknowledgments, Citations, References and Footnotes

Schimel (2012) Chapters 16 and 17

Class 11: April 20

Writing assignment 4 (ca. 300 – 500 words): Conclusions

Peer review 4 (in-text comments)

Schimel (2012) Chapter 15

A. How to Write the Review of an Article

Polsky, Andrew J. 2007. "Seeing Your Name in Print: Unpacking the Mysteries of the Review Process at Political Science Scholarly Journals." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 40 (3): 539-43.

Miller et al. 2013. "How to Be a Peer Reviewer: A Guide for Recent and Soon-to-Be PhDs." *PS: Political Science and Politics* January: 120 – 123.

B. Framing Research Questions for Specific Audiences

Rich, Timothy S. 2013. "Publishing as a Graduate Student: A Quick and (Hopefully) Painless Guide to Establishing Yourself as a Scholar." *PS: Political Science and Politics* April: 376 – 379

Thunder, David. 2004. "Back to Basics: Twelve Rules for Writing a Publishable Article." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 37(3): 493-5

van Cott, Donna Lee. 2005. "A Graduate Student's Guide to Publishing Scholarly Journal Articles." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 38(4): 741-743.

Class 12: April 24

Grant Finding and Grant Writing

Przeworski, Adam and Frank Salomon. 1995. *On the Art of Writing Proposals: Some Candid Suggestions for Applicants to Social Science Research Council Competitions*. SSRC.

Henson, Kenneth T. 2003. "Debunking Some Myths about Grant Writing." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 26.

Moffat, Anne Simon. 1994. "Grantsmanship: what makes proposals work?" *Science* 265 (September 23)

Class 13: April 27

How to Write Effective Academic Presentations

Gemayel, R., & Martin, S. J. (2019). How to prepare and deliver a great talk. *The FEBS Journal*, 286(1), 39–45. <https://doi.org/10.1111/febs.14726>

Bennett, G., & Jessani, N. (Eds.). (2011). *The knowledge translation toolkit: bridging the know-do gap: a resource for researchers*. New Delhi, India; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Ottawa, ON: Sage Publications; International Development Research Centre: pp. 205-214

Dahlin, M. (2006) Giving a Conference Talk.
<https://www.cs.utexas.edu/~dahlin/professional/goodTalk.pdf>

Class 14: May 4

How to Promote your Results through Writing: Academic Social Networks, Blogs, Podcasts and Newsletters

Kulczycki, E. (2013). Transformation of Science Communication in the Age of Social Media, *Teorie vědy / Theory of Science*, Vol 35, No 1 (2013), pp. 3-28.

Class 15: May 8

Concluding remarks

Final paper due May 22, 2020

Table 1. Assignments, Due Dates, and Minimum Word Count

Assignment	Due Date	Min. Number of Words
Summary 1: Schimel (2012) Chapter 5	March 9	200
Writing assignment 1: Introduction and Research Question	March 14	300
Peer Review: Introduction	March 15	n/a
Summary 2: Schimel (2012) Chapter 10	March 20	200
Writing assignment 2: Theory and Hypotheses	March 21	300
Peer review 2: Theory and Research Questions, and Hypotheses	March 22	n/a
Writing assignment 3: Data and Methods	March 28	300
Peer review 3: Data and Methods	March 29	n/a
Summary 3: Schimel (2012) Chapter 17	April 6	200
Writing assignment 4: Conclusions	April 18	300
Peer review 4: Conclusions	April 19	n/a
Final Writing Assignment	May 22	2000 ^a

^a This is also the maximum.