



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

Spring 2026

ERSS Part II: Writing in the Social Sciences
(Semester II, 30 hours, 3 ECTS)

Instructors:	Joshua Dubrow and Ilona Wysmułek
Place:	Room 232
Time:	Tuesdays, 10:30 – 12:30
First class period:	Tuesday, February 17, 2026
Course Website:	socialinquiry.wordpress.com
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Office Hours:	By appointment
Readings:	Available in the ERSS Google Drive Folder, link shared in class

Description of ERSS Part II

At the heart of academic social science are theory-informed empirical research articles and grant proposals, and constructive criticism on the drafts that your colleagues wrote. Part II of the ‘Empirical Research in the Social Sciences’ (ERSS) course instructs students in how to write English language empirical articles and grant proposals in the social sciences. 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 6.2), *Social Forces* (IF 3.1), and *European Sociological Review* (IF 3.0), and specialty journals such as *Qualitative Sociology* (IF 2.1). These articles have ca. 8000-9000 words and tend to follow a similar structure: Title, abstract, introduction, theory, data and methods, results, conclusion, footnotes/endnotes, acknowledgements, and references. Other sections depend on the methods and content of the empirical analyses, such as “setting” (for qualitative articles), “hypotheses” and “analytical strategy” (for quantitative articles) and appendices. By grant proposals, we mean those that are peer-reviewed and submitted to a government research agency or foundation, e.g. the Preludium grant of the National Science Center (NCN), Poland, for early-career scholars. In addition, the course introduces basic principles on how to write policy papers and briefs.

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

Learning Objectives and Outcomes

With regard to Polish Qualifications Framework Level 8 (P8), students, through the successful completion of the course, will acquire knowledge, skills, and social competences. In general, they will know and understand the world's achievements in writing practices in science (P8U_W) and the resulting implications of this for the practice related to general and selected specific issues of the social sciences, and rules for dissemination of scientific results in academic journals, including through open access (P8S_WG). They will perform critical analysis and evaluation of the results of scientific research and their contribution to knowledge analysis of the parts of an empirical research article (P8S_UW). Students will independently plan their own development as well as inspire the development of others through writing a final paper based on their own research and learning how to constructively criticize the writing of their colleagues (P8U_U); they will assume professional and public challenges taking into consideration their ethical dimension with regard to the ethics of peer review, citations, and authorship (P8U_K). They will critically evaluate their contributions to the development of that field, i.e. elucidate the knowledge gap (P8S_KK). They will learn principles to uphold and develop the ethos of the research community, including, through several writing assignments, conducting the writing of research in an independent manner (P8S_KR). They will understand the ethics with regard to respecting the principle of the public ownership of academic research results, taking into account the idea of intellectual property rights (P8S_KR). They will understand principles of disseminating research results, including to the general public (P8S_UK) and to the social sphere (P8S_UW).

Specifically, ERSS Part II aims to provide students key skills for how to write for the top English language social science journals and research grant organizations. At the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Develop useful writing strategies and habits (P8U_U)
- Understand and critically assess the structure of empirical research articles & the content of each section (P8S_WG, P8S_UW)
- Gain experience in writing sections of a theory-informed, empirically-based article (P8S_WG)
- Understand basic principles of how to write research grant proposals (P8S_UW)
- Revise and edit own writing (P8U_U)
- Provide constructive criticism on the writing of colleagues (P8U_U, P8S_UW)
- Understand basic ethical principles of co-authorship and citation (P8U_K)
- Understand basic principles of how to write a policy paper / brief (P8S_WK)

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Class Participation (10%): Students are expected to have read the required reading due for that day.

Short writing assignments (25%): Students will write short texts to be submitted to the instructors. Details will be discussed in class and distributed in a separate document.

Peer review assignments (10%): Students will write two peer reviews, in which they are required to constructively critique assigned short writings of their in-class colleagues. Principles of providing constructive and polite writing feedback will be discussed in class.

Group Assignment: Preparing a Grant Proposal Plan (15%): To practice and gain skills in grant writing process and in developing fundable research ideas, students will engage in a group exercise. Students will get into groups of two to three people, and together, discuss and prepare a grant proposal plan (1 page), following the instructions distributed and discussed during class. Students prepare and submit one grant proposal plan per group. For each grant proposal plan, students must identify two grants they can apply to as a PhD student, with name of the funding agency, webpage, and deadline.

Final paper (40%): At the end of the course, students will submit to the instructors a paper based on empirical research (one that they have written and revised throughout the course), of no less than 3000 and no more than 3100 words, due June 23, 2026. Details on the content and structure of this assignment will be discussed in class and distributed in a separate document.

Policies on Attendance, Late Materials, and Make-Up

Attendance is mandatory and counts toward your classroom participation grade. Please notify the instructors in advance if you are unable to attend a given class. As a rule, this course meets in person. Under exceptional circumstances, such as documented participation in a short-term study/research visit or as a presenter at a scientific conference, and after discussing your situation with the instructors at least a day prior to the class session, it may be possible to attend up to two of the fifteen class sessions online.

Learning Materials

Required readings

Schimmel, 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

Wallwork, Adrian. 2016. *English for Writing Research Papers*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-26094-5>.

Additional resources

The Academic Phrasebank, The University of Manchester, <https://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>

Becker, H. S., & Richards, P. (2007). *Writing for social scientists: How to start and finish your thesis, book, or article* (2nd ed). University of Chicago Press.

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

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.

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

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

Online academic writing courses for non-native speakers of English

"How to Write an Essay: An introduction to academic writing for English Language Learners, focusing on essay development, grammatical correctness, and self-editing" <https://www.edx.org/course/how-to-write-an-essay>

"Academic English Online: A self-access resource for students in higher education"
<http://aeo.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/>

"Writing in the Sciences" Stanford University <https://online.stanford.edu/courses/som-y0010-writing-sciences>

YouTube videos on academic writing

"Scientific Writing: Beyond Tips and Tricks," by Judy Swan, Carnegie Mellon University
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLPCdDp_LE0&t=354s

"Leadership Lab: The Craft of Writing Effectively," by Larry McEnerney, Director of the University of Chicago's Writing Program <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtIzMaLkCaM>

Course Lectures in *The Sociology Place* by Josh Dubrow

These are lecture notes in the form of blog posts in <https://thesociology.place/> written by Josh Dubrow. They are the basis of Josh's lectures. To access them, in the website you can copy and paste the title into the search box.

Topic - Thinking about writing: (i) What is an empirical research article in the social sciences? | (ii) How to think about academic writing in the social sciences | (iii) Writing habits and writing strategies

Topic - Basic knowledge about social science articles: (i) Knowledge gap and examples | (ii) Research questions with examples | (iii) Outline of the structure of research articles in the social sciences

Topic - How to write each part of the article: (i) How to write an abstract for a social science research article | (ii) Effective titles in social science research are short, truthful, and informative | (iii) How to write the introduction to a research article in the social sciences | (iv) How to write the theory section of a research article in the social sciences | (v) Data write-up: The who, what, when, where, and why | (vi) How to write the results section of a research article in the social sciences | (vii) Writing the conclusion section of a research article in the social sciences | (viii) Writing the acknowledgements section of a research article

Topic - Principles of good writing: Arcs and flow: Good academic writing with examples

Topic - Ethics: Authorship and substantial contributions

Topic - Using AI assistants: (i) Artificial intelligence (AI) and the social scientist | (ii) How to use ChatGPT in social science research | (iii) Quantitative research in the social sciences and ChatGPT | (iv) ChatGPT Deep Research Output Misleads Us about Data Collection and Analysis | (v) AI Writing Tips from Economist Tyler Cowen

Topic - Grant writing: (i) Some tips on finding research grants | (ii) Grant writing: what makes social science research ideas fundable? | (iii) 10 tips for writing research grant proposals

Topic - Peer review: (i) Writing peer review in the social sciences: constructive, honest, and respectful | (ii) How to write a peer review for an article in a social science journal

Course Outline

SECTION 1: Processes and Constructive Criticism

Class 1, February 17

A. Writing is personal and professional

Becker, H. S., & Richards, P. (2007 [1986]). "Learning to Write as a Professional." Chapter 5 in *Writing for social scientists*.

B. Science writing as storytelling

Schimmel (2012) Chapters 1, 2, 3

Class 2, February 24

A. Writing Strategies and Writing Habits

Smith, Chris. 2018. "Six academic writing habits that will boost productivity." *LSE Impact Blog*

B. How to Provide Constructive Criticism

Colin Monaghan. 2016. "Give your students better writing feedback. A practical guide for instructors."

Class 3, March 3

How to use AI assistants (e.g. ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini) to write a research paper

Google NotebookLM <https://notebooklm.google/> | ASReview Lab <https://asreview.readthedocs.io/en/latest/index.html> | Taylor & Francis AI Policy <https://taylorandfrancis.com/our-policies/ai-policy> | Elsevier Generative AI policies for journals <https://www.elsevier.com/about/policies-and-standards/generative-ai-policies-for-journals> | Our Kids' IQs Are Dropping. Is Big Tech to Blame? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aByWLQ7h2n0>

SECTION 2: Writing Specific Parts of the Article

Class 4, March 10

How to Write Titles and Abstracts

Lebrun (2011) Chapters 10 - 12

Class 5, March 17

Writing the Introduction

Review of knowledge gap statement and research questions; from literature review to critical literature review; Structure of introductions, with examples

Schimel (2012) Chapters 4, 5 and 6

DUE Writing Assignment 1: Literature review (500 words)

Class 6, March 24

Writing the Theory (and Hypothesis) section

Schimel (2012) Chapters 7 and 8

DUE Writing Assignment 2: Critical literature review (500 words)

Class 7, March 31

Improving your Data and Methods section

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

Roberts, C., Kumar, K. & Finn, G. Navigating the qualitative manuscript writing process: some tips for authors and reviewers. *BMC Med Educ* 20, 439 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-020-02370-4>

DUE Writing assignment 3: Knowledge gap statement (200 words)

Class 8, April 14

Tables and Figures for the Whole Article: Theory, Data, Methods, and Results

Lebrun (2011) Chapter 15

Swedberg, R. (2016). Can You Visualize Theory? On the Use of Visual Thinking in Theory Pictures, Theorizing Diagrams, and Visual Sketches. *Sociological Theory*, 34(3), 250–275.

DUE Writing Assignment 4: Introduction (500 words)

Class 9, April 21

A. How to Write the Results

Gopaldas, Ahir. "A front-to-back guide to writing a qualitative research article." *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* 19, no. 1 (2016): 115-121.

B. In-class peer review discussion

DUE - Peer Review 1: Introduction

Class 10, April 28

A. Authorship, Acknowledgments, and Citations

The Nature Portfolio. Chapters: Authorship; Reporting standards and availability of data, materials, code and protocols; Acknowledgements: <https://www.nature.com/nature-portfolio/editorial-policies>

Authorship and Substantial Contributions: <https://thesociology.place/authorship-and-substantial-contributions/>

B. What goes in Appendices and Footnotes

Unit 5 in Writing in the Sciences. Stanford Online course: <https://online.stanford.edu/courses/som-y0010-writing-sciences>

DUE Writing Assignment 5: Data and Methods

Class 11, May 12

How to Write the Conclusion

Schimmel (2012) Chapters 9 and 18

B. In-class peer review discussion

DUE - Peer Review 2: Data and Methods

SECTION 3: Grant Proposals and Policy Papers

Class 12, May 19

How to approach grant writing: Applications and processes

A. Why to apply? The role of grants in academic research

B. Finding grant, fellowship, and scholarship opportunities

Read: National Science Centre, Poland - Preludium call for proposals

Class 13, May 26

Some main principles in formulation and writing of grant proposals

- A. What makes a research idea fundable?
- B. Examining the rules and procedures of NCN grants

Sohn, Emily. 2019. "Secrets to writing a winning grant: Experienced scientists reveal how to avoid application pitfalls to submit successful proposals" *Nature* (December)

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

Class 14, June 2

- A. How do reviewers approach funding proposals? Understanding the reviewers' perspective
- B. In-class exercise on group project

Class 15, June 9

- A. Policy writing. Guest Lecture: Dr. Edit Zgut, IFiS PAN

Young, Eoin, and Lisa Quinn. 2002. "Writing effective public policy papers." Open Society Institute, Budapest - Introduction and Chapter 5

- B. Open Q&A about publishing

Rich, Timothy S. "Publishing as a graduate student: A quick and (hopefully) painless guide to establishing yourself as a scholar." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 46, no. 2 (2013): 376-379

DUE: Group assignment: Grant proposal plan

FINAL PAPER due JUNE 23, 2026