



MA Seminar English Academic Writing
Winter term 2021/2022 (2SSt)
Wednesday, 12:15-13:45h
Raum: Domstraße 9a – Raum 3.07

Academic writing for Social Scientists: How to write professionally

SYLLABUS

Seminar description

This seminar aims to support students in strengthening their English writing skills. The capacity to express one's thoughts in a well-structured, easy-to-follow and clear manner is a key competence for social scientists in all kinds of professions. During this seminar, students will learn how to (1) structure various types of academic writings, (2) think and write clearly and in appropriate style, and (3) systematically revise their own writing to improve its quality. For that purpose, the seminar will start as a reading class. The course introduces the basics of clear and beautiful writing, including the concept of genre, structure, and style. Students will learn about recommendations concerning the composition and revision process, paragraph and sentences structure, as well as precise language. Afterwards, the seminar turns into a writing class. Students will submit pages of their writing, and the whole class will discuss the writing, discussing aspects such as the structure of the overall text, each paragraph and sentence, as well as the clarity of the language and the appropriateness of the vocabulary. In a final set of sessions, we will discuss how language differs for various genres of writing students might have to write in their academic and professional life such as academic papers, abstracts, summary reports, research proposals, and letters of motivation.

Please take the following notes into account: While grammar and vocabulary will not be on the center of this class, specific issues might be discussed if requested by students. The seminar targets advanced Master students in Social Science, but is open for General Studies as well. However, all participants should have solid knowledge of the English language and experience in writing Social Science research papers.



Schedule

Wednesday, Oct. 13	Session 1	Organizational issues and introduction
Wednesday, Oct. 20	Session 2	Composing and getting started to write
Wednesday, Oct. 27	Session 3	Writing sound paragraphs
Wednesday, Nov. 3	Session 4	Sentence style
Wednesday, Nov. 10	Session 5	Word choice
Wednesday, Nov. 17	Session 6	Writing class: Introduction
Wednesday, Nov. 24	Session 7	Writing class: Theory
Wednesday, Dec. 1	Session 8	Writing class: Empirics
Wednesday, Dec. 8	Session 9	Writing class: Conclusion
Wednesday, Dec. 15	Session 10	Self-study phase
Wednesday, Jan. 5	Session 11	How to write: About statistics and speeches
Wednesday, Jan. 12	Session 12	How to write: Letters of motivation and research proposals
Wednesday, Jan. 19	Session 13	How to write: Abstracts and reports
Wednesday, Jan. 26	Session 14	Concluding session

Workload

The total workload for this seminar is 150 hours. This includes 30 hours of attendance in class, circa 60 hours for class preparation and about 60 hours for the class talk and its written report.

Attendance regulations

Discussions in class increase your chances to study successfully. The professor intends to create a productive, interactive, and learning-oriented atmosphere in class. In return, she expects students to read the weekly readings carefully, attend class and participate actively. Students' thoughts and comments concerning the organization of the class are highly welcome at any time.

Grading

Students will be graded based on the written report summarizing their presentation. Each student will prepare and present a 15-minutes talk in class. The presentation will engage with a specific genre, defining it, highlighting the peculiarities of good writing for this type of publication and providing best practice examples from other writers. Presentation topics will be assigned in Session 5. The written report of the presentation shall be no longer than 15 pages.

Session content, readings and exercises

Session 1 Wednesday, Oct. 15, 12:15-13:45h

Topic *Organizational issues and introduction*

Description In the first session, we discuss the schedule of the seminar and how to pass successfully. We further start by introducing some key concepts that will guide students through this class such as genre, structure, and style.

Part I: Theoretical reflections on good academic writing

Session 2 Wednesday, Oct. 20, 12:15-13:45h

Topic *Composing and starting to write*

Description In this very first session, we start where you would start writing: With the planning and drafting process. We discuss how to organize your time as well as various strategies to get started.

Readings Hacker, D. (2007). *A writer's reference*, Boston, Bedford, 1-18.

Msamala, J. (2018). Writing Thesis and Dissertation Proposals. Available online: https://www.academia.edu/31071291/Writing_Thesis_and_Dissertation_Proposals
The Graduate Writing Center of the Center for Excellence in Writing

Session 3 Wednesday, Oct. 27, 12:15-13:45h

Topic *Writing sound paragraphs*

Description Afterwards, we move on to the reviewing process that helps revising first drafts. We will elaborate in detail on the characteristics of good paragraphs and how to write them. It aims to strengthen students' capacity to write logically clear and convincing arguments.

Readings Hacker, D. (2007). *A writer's reference*, Boston, Bedford, 19-81 & 100-108.

Session 4 Wednesday, Nov. 3, 12:15-13:45h

Topic *Sentence style*

Description Session 4 is entirely dedicated to good sentence style. We will discuss different stylistic instruments and how they might enhance the clarity of your arguments. The class will further discuss the advantages and drawbacks of sentence variety vs. parallelism.

Readings Hacker, D. (2007). *A writer's reference*, Boston, Bedford, 109-138.

Session 5 Wednesday, Nov. 10, 12:15-13:45h

Topic *Word choice*

Description The last theoretical session engages with word choices. The careful usage of vocabulary is crucial for clear and beautiful academic writing. We will remind ourselves of some synonyms and the differences between vocabulary. Moreover, we reflect on the distinction between active and passive language and their usage. Lastly, we will highlight the role of confidence for presenting your ideas and prepare some guidelines how to reach this endeavor.

Part II: Writing class

Session 6 Wednesday, Nov. 17, 12:15-13:45h

Topic *Writing introductions*

Description In this very first writing class, we will engage with students' introductions in detail. Key points of interest will be: the quality of the red line throughout the introduction, the first paragraph as an eye catcher, and the ordering of paragraphs.

Exercises (1) Submit an introduction by Thursday, Nov. 11, 23:59h (max. 2 pages).
(2) Read and prepare written comments on the other students' submissions before class.

Session 7 Wednesday, Nov. 24, 12:15-13:45h

Topic *Writing theory sections*

Description The focal point of the second writing class are theory sections – meaning the formulation of comprehensive theoretical arguments so that logically conclusive hypotheses emerge. Students will receive comments concerning: the logical completeness of their arguments, the structure of each paragraph and the clarity of their language.

Exercises (1) Submit a theory section by Thursday, Nov. 18, 23:59h (max. 3 pages).
(2) Read and prepare written comments on the other students' submissions before class.

Session 8 Wednesday, Dec. 1, 12:15-13:45h

Topic *Writing empirical sections*

Description In the third writing class, we address the challenges of writing empirical sections based on students' writing samples. We will focus on discussing optimal strategies to present data, parsimonious but comprehensive descriptions of figures and tables, as well as clarity of language.

Exercises (1) Submit an empirical section by Thursday, Nov. 25, 23:59h (max. 3 pages).
(2) Read and prepare written comments on the other students' submissions before class.

Session 9 Wednesday, Dec. 8, 12:15-13:45h

Topic *Writing conclusions*

Description In this last writing class, students receive feedback on conclusions, thereby enhancing their capacity to craft strong finals for great papers. We will take into account the structure of good conclusions, how to express ideas in a brief but clear manner and paragraph structure.

Exercises (1) Submit a conclusion by Thursday, Dec. 2, 23:59h (max. 2 pages).
(2) Read and prepare written comments on the other students' submissions before class.

Part III: Writing for different purposes

Session 10 Wednesday, Dec. 15, 12:15-13:45h

Topic *Self-study phase*

Description In this self-study phase, students get started on their class talks. They start reading about their topic and select the obligatory reading for the other students. They further prepare a three-sentence summary of their talks that will be added to this syllabus.

Exercise Submit the results of the self-study phase by Thursday, Dec. 16, 23:59h.

Session 11 Wednesday, Jan. 5, 12:15-13:45h

Topic *How to write: About statistics and give a catchy talk*

Description tba

Readings tba

Session 12 Wednesday, Jan. 12, 12:15-13:45h

Topic *How to write: Letters of motivation and Tables*

Description tba

Readings tba

Session 13 Wednesday, Jan. 29, 12:15-13:45h

Topic *How to write: Abstracts and reports*

Description tba

Readings tba

Session 14 Wednesday, Jan. 26, 12:15-13:45h

Topic *Conclusion*

Description In this concluding session, we will reflect on what we have learned. Over and beyond, we look into unconventional academic writing – the art of crafting not only clear and precise, but also entertaining headings and texts. We will further discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using jokes and humorous remarks in professional texts.

Readings Cabanac, G. (2015). *Unconventional academic writing. An Addendum to Hartley's Academic Writing and Publishing: A Practical Handbook*. Available online at <http://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.1306561>.
