

## Graduate Publishing Practicum (Credits: 1)

Sociology 697P Spring 2018; Thursday 11:30a-12:30p; Location: Thompson 919  
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**Overview:** From some perspectives, publishing our research is at, or near, the core of what we do as social scientists. The quality of what we publish, where it gets published, whether it gets cited, and to what extent can shape a scientific career in surprising ways. Even if that seems a bit overdetermined, at a minimum we can probably agree that publishing is a primary mode through which we convey our findings to others. If there are any “secrets” to be learned about publishing research, most scholars would likely agree that it typically rewards (in no particular order): persistence, clarity of prose, the writer de-personalizing and divorcing assessments of the quality of their writing from their worth and value as a human being, and the ability to build a deep connection to ongoing conversations and theoretical or methodological debates in one’s subfield. Publishing is a systematized process with multiple organizational rules and norms, and formal and informal dimensions sometimes conflict.

**Goals:** The primary goal is to help you learn to reflect thoughtfully on how publishing fits into your research process, and to improve your own writing. By the end of the term, you should have a piece of writing that’s ready to be sent for external review. The ancillary goals of the course are to demystify the process of publication; to help you learn how to respond to critical reviews of your research; and to learn to write constructive reviews of the research of your peers.

**Format:** We’ll meet weekly, and I’d encourage us all to bring food and have this be a brown-bag working lunch. There will typically be a short reading on the theme of the week, and we’ll spend the beginning part of the hour discussing it. The rest of the hour we’ll spend workshopping, in 2 ways:

- 1<sup>st</sup> half of the term: each of you will share a “micro-challenge” associated with a writing snippet (no more than ½-3/4- page) that you’re having trouble with. This is practice. One of the writing muscles that we’ll be striving to develop is breaking down what can seem an overwhelming task into manageable chunks. We’ll discuss it and give you feedback.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the term: you’ll each share the entire piece you’re revising ahead of time by the Thursday before your assigned week, and three of us will practice writing a formal review of it to be shared with the you by the following Wed at 12n (a day prior to your assigned week). We’ll discuss the reviews during the seminar.

Since all of us have projects that are in different stages of development, we’ll figure out a schedule for “who shares when” during the first session. You should come prepared knowing what piece of your writing you’d like to workshop this term – it should be something that’s unpublished that you *already have a draft of*, and that you want to commit to making better and getting out there.

**Course material:** Reading is light – this is primarily a seminar to workshop your papers. Everyone should obtain a copy of Howie Becker’s “*Writing for Social Scientists*”, from which we’ll read several chapters. (I’m aware that folks currently in the Spring 2018 Writing Seminar are also reading this book – but many of you haven’t, and it’s a must-read). The rest of your light reading will be a few articles that you can obtain on the course website. Reading is intentionally light for this course so that you can focus on your pre-publication and reflect on it. We’ll use Moodle to share our writing and for you to upload your memos, which should focus on your weekly observations on your revision process and readings.

**Grading.** This course will reward consistent engagement with the material and your colleagues, and will be evaluated P/F. Grades: 30% weekly memos due Wednesday by 12n (graded on a ✓-, ✓, ✓+ scale), 30% weekly attendance, and 40% giving peer feedback on each others’ work. For written assignments (weekly memos/feedback), a scale unit will be deducted for every day an assignment is turned in late.

## Part I: Nuts and Bolts

### Week 1 (January 25): What to publish?

*For most early-career scholars, the choice of what to publish is fairly straightforward – it's typically a master's thesis/comps, dissertation chapter, or collaborative project with a faculty member. But regardless, this is the perfect time to be giving thought to what you'd like your publication portfolio to look like in the coming years. What kind of scholar do you want to be?*

#### Reading:

- Erikson, K., 2008. On Sociological Writing. *Sociological Inquiry*, 78(3), pp.399-411
- Becker, H.S., 2008. Above All, Write with Clarity & Precision. *Sociol. Inquiry*, 78(3), pp.412-416.
- Rehman, J. 2018. "Novelty in science – real necessity or distracting obsession?" [\*The Conversation\*](#).

### Week 2 (Feb 1): Why publish?

*We all know the cliché of "publish or perish" in academia, and there's some complicated truths and untruths embedded in that phrase. But it goes deeper than that – we want to get out work out there and read by our colleagues for a variety of reasons. Beyond adding a grain of sand to the pile of knowledge, are you seeking to: Test a new hypothesis? Challenge or refute existing knowledge on a given question? Summarize what's known about a given topic? Replicate a known finding? Advocate for a policy change? And more...*

#### Reading:

- Bauman, Z., 2000. On writing: On writing sociology. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 17(1), pp.79-90.
- Becker, H.S., Writing for Social Scientists, Chapter 3, "One right way."

Memo topic due Wed: Thoughts about your publishing portfolio, circa 2028.

Workshop piece due Mon: Person 1 micro-challenge: TBD; Person 2 micro-challenge: TBD

### Week 3 (February 8): Where to publish?

*As scientists, now more than ever, we have an incredible range of ways to have our voices and ideas heard and tested. Traditional peer-reviewed print journals, single-blind vs. double-blind review processes, online-only journals (*Sociological Science*, *Socius*), social media & blogs, encyclopedia chapters, academic publishing houses, book chapters in edited volumes, op-eds, and self-archiving/pre-print servers (*socArxiv*, *arXiv*). Journal Impact Factor isn't everything. What's the best fit?*

#### Reading:

- Becker, H.S., Writing for Social Scientists, Chapter 4, "Editing by ear."
- Bauman, Z., 2002. Afterthought: On writing; on writing sociology. *Cultural Studies<->Critical Methodologies*, 2(3), pp.359-370.

Memo topic due Wed: Investigate short-list of possible publishing venues, rank top 4 and explain fit.

Workshop piece due Mon: Person 1 micro-challenge: TBD; Person 2 micro-challenge: TBD

### Week 4 (February 15): How to publish?, Part I (What's good?)

*Communicating our ideas clearly and effectively is perhaps the most critical part of what we do as scholars. Given the heterogeneity of the discipline, there are different standards for what counts as "good writing". Yet, we've all read pieces that the field considers to be classics, yet are, by some standards, completely impenetrable. What makes a piece of writing "good"?*

#### Reading:

- Becker, H.S., Writing for Social Scientists, Chapter 5, "Learning to write as a professional."
- Abbott, Andrew. 2007. "Against narrative: A preface to lyrical sociology." *Soc. Theory* 25:1, pp.67-99.

Memo topic due Wed: Succinct summary of your chosen workshop piece, assessment of its current strengths and challenges, and actionable outline for finishing revisions by May 1.

Workshop piece due Mon: Person 1 micro-challenge: TBD; Person 2 micro-challenge: TBD

### **Week 5 (February 22): \*\*\*No class\*\*\***

*You should work on continuing to revise your work. If you're dying for something to read, here are a couple of short essays by Ezra Zuckerman on writing & framing an argument I've found quite useful, but it's generic advice, and not specific to the publishing process.*

- Zuckerman Sivan, Ezra W. "Tips to Article-Writers." (2008 [Essay](#)); "On Genre: A Few More Tips to Article-Writers." (2017 [Essay](#)).

Memo topic due Wed: Who would be the 6 best scholars in your subfield to review your manuscript? Make a list of names, departments, institutions, email addresses, and a 1-sentence explanation of why.

### **Week 6 (March 1): How to publish?, Part II (Ethical Issues & Biases)**

*There are a set of conventions that most of us follow in seeing an article through publication in a journal, or publishing a book. For the former, these include crafting a cover letter, choosing suggested reviewers, and writing an abstract. For the latter, this typically involves putting together a book proposal, signing a contract with a publisher, and submitting the book manuscript on a specified deadline. What are ethical issues that arise in the publishing process? What are some of the biases?*

Reading:

- Becker, H.S, Writing for Social Scientists, Chapter 6, "Risk."
- Retraction Watch Blog. [Link here](#) (identification of problem). [Link here](#) (author's response). [Link here](#) (institution's response).
- Hengel, Erin. 2017. "Evidence from peer review that women are held to higher standards." [Link here](#).

Memo topic due Wed: Any reflections on ethical issues in publishing as it pertains to your work.

Workshop piece due Mon: Person 1 micro-challenge: TBD; Person 2 micro-challenge: TBD

### **Week 7 (March 8): When to publish?**

*"Is it ready to send out for review?" is an important question to ask; part of answering this question is having a clear sense of the novelty of what your piece contributes, how it articulates with what's known in the field, an honest appraisal of the strengths of your effort, and a lucid and clear-eyed sense of what its limitations are.*

Reading: Becker, H.S, Writing for Social Scientists, Chapter 7, "Getting it out the door."

Memo topic due Wed: Something you're struggling with in your manuscript.

Workshop piece due Mon: Person 1 micro-challenge: TBD; Person 2 micro-challenge: TBD

### **Week 8 (March 15): \*\*\* No class, spring break \*\*\***

*You may want to read ahead – the reading for Week 9 is relatively detailed (manuscript, reviews, then revised manuscript) and we'll have a conversation about how the author responded and your thoughts as to why the author made the choices they did.*

### **Week 9 (March 22): Responding to Reviews & Being a Constructive Reviewer**

*Whether you're working on a journal article, book chapter, or book manuscript, if your work makes it past the initial editor's desk, you're likely to be receiving critical feedback from peers and editors. This feedback can come in many forms: some constructive and kind, some opaque, some tone-deaf, some aggressive, some unhelpful, and some that you suspect came from the reviewer just reading the abstract and nothing else. Today we'll use an example of one of my submitted manuscripts & its reviews to illustrate this.*

Reading: Initial submission (v1); Peer reviews of that manuscript; Final manuscript (v2)

Memo topic due Wed: Reflections on these reviews and responses.

**Part II: Taking it apart, putting it back together, picking up the pieces, and throwing a bunch in the trash. (And maybe taking it apart again as necessary.)**

This part of the course is devoted to intensively workshopping your research and essentially doing a “dry run” of your manuscript submission. I’ll be assigning those who aren’t submitting that week to either do an intensive blind review *of at least 2* of your colleagues’ pieces during this part of the term (during the week when you’re not reviewing or authoring a piece, your job is to at least read the author’s piece and continue working on your own manuscript or the feedback you’ve received).

The point is this: reading critically and writing a review is a skill, and I want you to have more than one chance to do so. For most of us, it gets easier the more we do. This may also help you anticipate critiques you’ll receive from your actual anonymous reviewers in the field. Since this is an exercise, I’ll reveal who reviewed what pieces after each session – both to encourage you to be constructive with your comments, and to allow the author to continue the conversation with you afterwards. There will be times when you as a reviewer have subject matter expertise in the piece assigned to you. And other times it will be a stretch, in which case you might have to work harder to understand the material and/or function as the “general readership” to whom the author is trying to convey their findings.

Logistics:

The presenter will submit their work to Moodle no later than the Thursday before the assigned week at 5pm; that way peer reviewers will have from Thursday through Tuesday to read & complete their review. Peer reviewers will then submit their reviews by 12n Wednesday (the day before the work is to be discussed). I’ll function in the role of editor/moderator, and we’ll discuss both the research in question as well as the reviews submitted.

Note that you should include a mention on the first page of your manuscript letting readers know which publication venue your piece is intended for – a standard research article in *American Sociological Review*, or an 8500-word max research article in *Gender & Society*, may have different guidelines and style than an article in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, a “Brief Commentary” in the *Journal of Health & Social Behavior*, or encyclopedia article in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*. It’s up to the author to strictly adhere to the publication guidelines, and tables/figures should be prepared to the journal’s editorial standards. This means including a cover letter, blinding the manuscript in appropriate ways, and formatting as per journal guidelines.

**Week 10 (Mar 29): Workshopping, 2 pieces**

Person 1: TBD  
Person 2: TBD

**Week 13 (April 19): Workshopping, 2 pieces**

Person 1: TBD  
Person 2: TBD

**Week 11 (April 5): Workshopping, 2 pieces**

Person 1: TBD  
Person 2: TBD

**Week 14 (April 26): Workshopping, 2 pieces**

Person 1: TBD  
Person 2: TBD

**Week 12 (April 12): Workshopping, 2 pieces**

Person 1: TBD  
Person 2: TBD

**Week 15 (May 1): Final edits & polishing**