

## CMST 7903: Research Writing in Communication Studies

Monday 3:30-6:20

120 Prescott Hall

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Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9:00 – 9:30 a.m., 10:30 – 11:00 a.m. and by appointment  
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### Required Texts:

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

Belcher, W. L. (2009). *Writing your journal article in 12 weeks: A guide to academic publishing success*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G., & Williams, J. M. (2008). *The craft of research*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Graff, G., & Birkenstein, C. (2010). *They say, I say: The moves that matter in academic writing*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. NY: W. W. Norton & Co.

Silvia, P. J. (2007). *How to write a lot*. Washington, D. C.: American Psychological Association.

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### Goals and Objectives

This seminar is intended to build on *CMST 7900: Introduction to Graduate Studies in Communication Studies* and to help you improve the writing and research skills you need to succeed in your graduate and post-graduate academic careers. Learning to communicate research results in writing is an essential component of graduate education because it will be a significant part of your professional life to come. Learning some fundamental principles and practicing them on a regular basis is the best way to acquire the skills needed to write successfully. Hence, the objectives of the seminar are to:

- understand the different protocols and conventions of academic or scholarly writing
- demystify how researchers produce and publish such writing
- improve various skills needed to write productively by practicing them in this course

Although we will concentrate on writing essays for academic journals, we will also discuss other forms of writing in which you will be expected to demonstrate some proficiency, such as conference presentations, proposals, exams, theses and dissertations.

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## **Schedule**

Normally on a syllabus, I provide details for each class session. Because we have reading and writing assignments for each week, I developed a table that worked better in landscape rather than portrait. Therefore, our schedule is in a separate file. Check it regularly for what activities are assigned for each class session.

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## **Evaluation**

### ***Participation*** (20%)

One of the aims of the course is to show you that writing is a social activity, rather than a private affair. You will be expected to share your own writing with others in the seminar and you will receive lots of feedback on your work from others in the class. Consequently, you will also be expected to give lots of feedback to others to hold up your end of the social contract. Therefore, the participation portion of your grade will be based on your weekly attendance, weekly reports, posting materials in a timely fashion, providing feedback (orally and in writing), and the evaluation on your feedback.

*Attendance.* As graduate students you should attend each and every class session. If you cannot attend because of illness or an emergency, you should notify me before class begins.

*Weekly reports.* A major goal of the course is to help you develop positive writing habits. Belcher provides a series of tasks to complete on a nearly daily basis to help you develop good habits. Each week, you will turn in your writing schedule for the prior week. On the back of that sheet, you should also identify your successes and failures for the week with a plan for how to be even more successful in the following week. Along with an accounting of your time and activities, you should turn in a list of ideas, suggestions, warnings, etc. from that week's readings that you found helpful or think will be helpful in the future. The readings have lots of suggestions. Not all of these suggestions will apply to you or will resonate with your approach to writing and research. Include on this list the ideas that you will want to find in the future. At the end of the semester, you should have a list of ideas to which you will be able to return when you hit writing barriers as you continue in your career. And, yes, it is a way for me to see if you are doing the reading and to bring topics for conversation to class.

*Posting materials.* Because a key component of this course is developing your abilities to seek, receive and provide feedback on writing, you will be sharing your materials on a regular basis. For the participation portion of your grade, I will simply check to see if you have posted the required materials for the week by the deadline.

*Providing feedback.* To reinforce the social aspect of writing, a portion of your participation grade will be based on whether or not you are providing feedback to your classmates. You will provide feedback orally and in writing. I will be checking to see if you are indeed doing so.

*Evaluation of your feedback.* This aspect of your participation grade will be based on at least one written report from others in class as they reflect on the quality of feedback that you are providing. If you are not providing feedback or are doing a superficial job of providing feedback, they will let me know. I will summarize these comments and provide you with feedback about their perspectives on your feedback so that you may continue to improve in this area.

### ***Writing exercises (70%)***

The graduate faculty in developing and requiring this seminar want to emphasize that writing is a *process*. Consequently, this seminar approaches the task of writing an essay for publication by taking you through that process (that is, one version of that process) and breaking it down into a series of smaller and more focused writing tasks and exercises. Revising is at the heart of writing successfully for publication. Developing a schedule with good work habits that accomplish your writing goals on a regular and frequent basis will impact your success in this course and, ultimately, in your academic career. Naturally, writing assignments will make up the bulk of your grade in this course. These assignments include: manuscript revisions, a journal submission of your revised work with a cover letter, the Boice and Belcher diagnostic tests, outlines, the completed journal review form, problem sentences, and the short writing assignment.

*Manuscript revisions.* One of the best predictors of success in the academy is the willingness and ability to revise your writing. This course breaks down revising into a series of smaller steps. You must select one manuscript to work on throughout the semester. While posting your writing on time is important to your participation (and that of your classmates) in the seminar, having something to post is more important. I will check to see if you are posting your writing and working on revising it for submission. See the schedule for weekly details.

*Journal submission with a cover letter.* One goal of the class is to get you to submit a revised manuscript for publication by the end of the semester. Along with a well-written final draft of the paper itself, you will also write a letter of submission to the editor of your selected journal. You will submit these materials to me as well.

*Boice diagnostic test.* This test helps you to identify barriers to your writing. Based on this analysis, you will develop a plan to help you overcome these barriers. Although you will turn in the diagnostic early in the semester, it should serve as a source of insight for you as you reflect on your writing successes and failures throughout the semester. This tool is posted on Moodle.

*Belcher diagnostic test.* We all develop writing “tics,” that is, phrases or word choices that are habitual but not meaningful or clear. This test, in the *12 Weeks* book, will help you to identify your habits and work towards eliminating problems.

*Outlines.* Different authors, some of whom we will read this semester, have different ideas about outlining – when to do it, how to do it, why to do it. We will do a formal outlining exercise at one point in the semester. You will outline your own work and an exemplar to help you look at organization and (re)consider how to make your overall argument more effective by using clear structure. In addition, (which is one of my writing tics) we will talk about how and when to use outlining to help you clarify your own thinking and writing without becoming formulaic in your writing structure.

*Journal review form.* Selecting an appropriate outlet for your research project is almost as important as getting your project written up. You will have more success in publishing your work if you understand the biases of a particular journal and/or editor and write up your project in a style that is appropriate to those biases. This exercise focuses on each of you evaluating one journal. By sharing your findings, you have information about several journals. You should continue to apply this information so that you have a range of potential outlets for your work.

*Problem sentences.* The focus of our revisions will be on organization, staking a claim and clarifying your argument. These issues are considered macro-revising. Word choice and sentence structure are considered micro-revising. Throughout the semester, be on the lookout for sentences that you think are problematic. One week we will collect these sentences and spend considerable time working through these problems and trying to discover better ways to phrase them. You will need to post some samples so that we have a body of examples with which to work.

*Short writing assignment.* Although this course focuses on writing a journal article, academics are expected to write a wide range of materials. The short writing assignment offers you the chance to work on a scholarly assignment that is shorter (typically 2-3 pages in submission form, not final print form) than a journal article, but also valuable to your academic career. Depending on your area of emphasis, you will choose to write a different kind of short assignment.

*Rhetoricians* write book reviews. The best reviews do not just summarize the book, but situate it within the scholarly discussion and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments being made within that context. You will easily find good examples of book reviews to guide you through this process, but also feel free to talk to the faculty in this area as you work on your review.

*Performance Studies scholars* are often challenged by outsiders who question the value of performance in general and staging performance in particular. NCA has developed (mainly through our PS faculty) a peer review process for performances. Although there is no current published outlet for these reviews, they are important as part of faculty members' tenure and promotion packets. Being able to write such reviews – that do much the same as the book review does for rhetoricians – will be valuable to you and to your peers. Since there are few published examples of these reviews, look at the work of others presented during Talk Back sessions and talk to the faculty in this area as you work on your review.

*Communication theory scholars* do not have an equivalent to the review, but often write letters of intent for grant proposals. Granting agencies may first solicit a letter of intent which is evaluated and only the authors of the strongest projects are invited to complete a full proposal. This process saves time for both the granting agency and those who are submitting proposals. Because the letter of intent is assessed for appropriateness and potential, being able to pitch a

project in this form is important to getting the opportunity to submit a full proposal. Some granting agencies post examples of successful proposals, but the faculty in the area will also be able to help you as you work on your letter of intent.

### ***Oral presentation (10%)***

Each of you will give a 10-15 minute presentation on your submitted manuscript during the last session of the class. **Because we have one less week this year – we will not be doing this activity as you likely have plenty of opportunities elsewhere.**

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### **Reasonable Accommodation**

The Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: If you have a disability that impacts your work in this class and for which you may require accommodation, please see a Coordinator in the Office for Disability Affairs (112 Johnston Hall). After you receive your accommodations letters, please meet with me to discuss the provisions of those accommodations as soon as possible.