

"The effort the writer does not put into writing, the reader has to put into reading."
Stephen Toulmin

ED 292
Academic Writing for Clarity and Grace
Spring, 2017
Wednesday, 1:30-4:20 pm
2-4 units; S/NC
Building 240, Room 110

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Course Description

The title sounds like a joke, since academics (especially in the social sciences) do not have a reputation for writing with either clarity or grace much less both. But I hope in this class to draw students into my own and every other academic's lifelong quest to become a better writer. The course will bring in a wide range of reference works that I have found useful over the years in working on my own writing and in helping students with theirs. The idea is not that a 10 week class will make students good writers; many of us have been working at this for 30 years or more and we're just getting started. Instead, the plan is to provide students with some helpful strategies, habits, and critical faculties; increase their sense of writing as an extended process of revision; and leave them with a set of books that will support them in their own lifelong pursuit of good writing.

Class process: Classes will include some instruction on particular skills and particular aspects of the writing process: developing an analytical angle on a subject; writing a good sentence; getting started in the writing process; working out the logic of the argument; developing the forms of validation for the argument; learning what your point is from the process of writing rather than as a precursor to writing; and revising, revising, revising. We will spend another part of the class working as a group doing exercises in spotting and fixing problems. For these purposes we will use some helpful examples from the Williams book and elsewhere that focus on particular skills, but much of the work will involve texts provided by the participants, students and instructors alike. We will spend a third part of the class working in individual writing groups, going over feedback that students gave each other about their writing for that week.

Work outside of class: Everyone needs to develop a recognition of the value of getting critical feedback from others on their work in progress, so we will be exchanging papers and having students work at editing each other's work. Student work outside of class will include reading required texts, editing other student's work around particular

areas of concern, and working on revising your own paper or papers. Every week you will be submitting a piece of written work to your writing group by email, which will involve repeated efforts to edit a particular text of your own; and every week you will provide feedback to others in your group about their own texts. In doing this kind of writing and rewriting, we will rely on Word's tracking changes function to record the stages of change in the texts. Ethan and I will divide up the writing groups and provide comments on student papers in those groups each week.

Much of class time will focus on working on particular texts around a key issue of the day – like framing, wordiness, clarity, sentence rhythm. These texts will be examples from the readings and also papers by students, on which they would like to get feedback from the class as a whole. Topics will include things like:

- Framing an argument, writing the introduction to a paper
- Elements of rhetoric
- Sentence rhythm and music
- Emphasis – putting the key element at the end of sentence and paragraph; delivering the punch line
- Concision – eliminating wordiness
- Clarity – avoiding nominalizations; opting for Anglo-Saxon words; clearing up murky syntax
- Focusing on action and actors
- Metaphor and imagery
- Correct usage: punctuation, common grammatical errors, word use
- Avoiding the most common academic tics: jargon, isms, Latinate constructions, nominalizations, abstraction, hiding from view behind passive voice and third person
- The basics of making an argument
- Using quotes – integrating them into your argument, and commenting on them instead of assuming they make the point on their own.
- Using data – how to integrate data into a text and explain its meaning and significance
- The relation of writing and thought
- Revision – of writing and thinking
- The relation of grammar and mechanics to rhetorical effect
- Sentence style
- The relation of style to audience
- Disciplinary conventions for style, organization, modes of argument, evidence
- Authority and voice

Eligibility

This class is open to doctoral students and master's students, not undergraduates.

Students with documented disabilities: Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the

Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) located within the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). SDRC staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an *Accommodation Letter* for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the SDRC as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, 723-1067 TTY).

Requirements

The requirements for students enrolled in this class include: Read the assigned texts about the writing process; write and edit your own work; edit the work of others; participate in the writing workshop in class; submit writing/editing for every class; and assume the role of both reviewer and reviewee. Let me say a little about each of these.

Read Assigned Portions of Required Texts about the Process of Writing: There are five required books for the class, which explore aspects of the writing process, and we will be reading selections from these books every week, along with some other articles about writing that will be posted on the course site on Canvas.

Writing and Editing Your Own Work: All students are expected to draw on their own written work for the class. These can be papers you are working on for other courses, research papers, master's projects, or doctoral dissertations. They can also be papers you have written in the past but want to revise, edit, and enhance. They can be past papers that you simply want to use as media for learning the craft of writing and editing. The understanding is that you will be willing to allow your work to be used for editorial comment by other students and, from time to time, for whole-class discussion.

Edit the Work of Other Students: All students are also expected to devote time to editing papers prepared by other students in the class. It's often easier to see the problems in others people's writing than in your own, so editing the work of peers is a good way to learn the craft of editing. The idea is then to apply these same editing skills to your own work.

Participate in the Writing Workshop in Class: Every week in class we will spend at least part of the time working on writing problems as a whole group. We'll take instructional examples from a book on writing, in order to work on particular skills – such as concision, clarity, action, rhythm, balance, grace, and emphasis. And we will take a particular paper of yours or mine, project it on the screen, and then talk about how to improve it, recording the changes as we go and then comparing versions.

Submit Writing to Your Group for Every Class and Comment on the Work of Other Students in the Group: Every week, you will be required to submit a paper to your writing group and ask for feedback about a particular section or advice on a particular problem you are working on. You will also be required to suggest editorial changes and make comments on the papers submitted by other members of your group. For this

purpose we will be using Word's Tracking Changes function, so you can see both the original text and the proposed changes. Two days before class, you will email your comments and suggested revisions back to the author.

Assume the Roles of Both Reviewer and Reviewee: Writing is a very personal process and the things we write are expressions of who we are, so it is important for everyone in the class to keep focused on being constructive in their comments and being tolerant of criticism from others. Criticism from others is very important for writers, but no one likes it. I have a ritual every time I get feedback on a paper or manuscript – whether blind reviews from journals or publishers or personal comments from colleagues. I let the review sit for a while until I'm in the right mood. Then I open it and skim it quickly to get the overall impression of how positive or negative it is. At that point I set it aside, cursing the editors for sending the paper to such an incompetent reviewer or reconsidering my formerly high opinion of the particular colleague-critic, then finally coming back a few days later (after a vodka or two) to read the thing carefully and assess the damage. Neurotic I know, but most writers are neurotic about their craft. It's hard not to take criticism personally. Beyond all reason, I always expect the reviewers to say, "Don't change a word; publish it immediately!" But somehow they never do. So I'm asking all members of the class both to recognize the vulnerability of their fellow writers and to open themselves up to the criticism of these colleagues in the craft.

Grading

This course is offered on a Satisfactory/No Credit basis. To pass, students must complete course requirements.

Readings

Required books (all but Garner are available at the Stanford Bookstore; Garner is much cheaper online). Books listed with an * are ones where older editions are available; it's ok to use one of these editions instead of the most recent version.

- *Williams, Joseph M. & Bizup, Joseph. (2016). *Style: Lessons in clarity and grace* (12th ed.). New York: Longman.
- *Becker, Howard S. (2007). *Writing for social scientists: How to start and finish your thesis, book, or article* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- *Graff, Gerald, & Birkenstein, Cathy. (2014). *"They say, I say:" The moves that matter in academic writing* (3rd ed.). New York: Norton.
- Sword, Helen. (2012). *Stylish academic writing*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- *Garner, Bryan A. (2009). *Garner's modern American usage*. New York: Oxford University Press. (I didn't order this for the bookstore because you can buy a cheaper copy online.)

Other required readings are available in PDF on the course's site website on the GSE Canvas system at <https://web.stanford.edu/group/canvas/discovery/>. All students enrolled in the class will receive an email from GSE IT telling you how to log in. IT support for

any problems with the Canvas system is available at instructionalsupport@stanford.edu. If you are auditing, I will need to send your ID information to IT in order for you to get access.

Course Outline

* = available on Canvas

1) 4/5: Introduction to Course; Writing Rituals; Writing Well, or at Least Less Badly

- *Zinnser, William. (2010). Writing English as a second language. *Point of Departure* (Winter). Americanscholar.org.
- *Munger, Michael C. (2010). 10 tips for how to write less badly. *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Sept. 6). Chronicle.com.
- *Lepore, Jill. (2009). How to write a paper for this class. History Department, Harvard University.
- *Lamott, Anne. (2005). Bird by bird: Some instructions on writing and life. In *English 111 Reader*. Miami University Department of English.
- *Zuckerman, Ezra W. (2008). Tips to article writers.
<http://web.mit.edu/ewzucker/www/Tips%20to%20article%20writers.pdf>.

2) 4/12: Clarity; Workshop

Williams, Joseph M. & Bizup, Joseph. (2013). *Style: Lessons in clarity and grace* (11th ed.). New York: Longman. Lessons One, Two, Three, Four, Five, and Six.

3) 4/19: Structuring the Argument in a Paper; Workshop

- Graff, Gerald, & Birkenstein, Cathy. (2014). “*They say, I say:*” *The moves that matter in academic writing* (3rd ed.). New York: Norton.
- *Wroe, Ann. (2011). In the beginning was the sound. *Intelligent Life Magazine*, Spring. <http://moreintelligentlife.com/content/arts/ann-wroe/beginning-was-sound>.

4) 4/26: Grace; Workshop

- Williams, Joseph M. & Bizup, Joseph. (2013). *Style: Lessons in clarity and grace* (11th ed.). New York: Longman. Lessons Seven, Eight, and Nine.
- *Orwell, George. (1946). Politics and the English Language. *Horizon*.
- *Lipton, Peter. (2007). Writing Philosophy.

5) 5/3: Stylish Academic Writing; Workshop

Sword, Helen. (2012). *Stylish academic writing*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Check out Helen Sword's website, Writer's Diet, which allows you to paste in a text of your own and get back an analysis of how flabby or fit it is:
<http://www.writersdiet.com/WT.php>.
- *Haslett, Adam. (2011). The art of good writing. *Financial Times* (Jan. 22). Ft.com.
- 6) 5/10: Writing in the Social Sciences; Workshop
 Becker, Howard S. (2007). *Writing for social scientists: How to start and finish your thesis, book, or article* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 7) 5/17: Usage; Workshop
 Garner, Bryan A. (2009). *Garner's modern American usage*. New York: Oxford University Press. Selections.
 *Wallace, David Foster. (2001). Tense present: Democracy, English, and the wars over usage. *Harpers* (April), 39-58.
- 8) 5/24: Writing with Clarity and Grace; Workshop
 *Limerick, Patricia. (1993). Dancing with professors: The trouble with academic prose.
 *M. Scott Brauer. (2014). Writing instructor, skeptical of automated grading, pits machine vs. machine. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 28.
 *Pinker, Steven. (2014). Why academics stink at writing. *Chronicle of Education*, Sept. 26.
- 9) 5/31: Clarity of Form; Workshop
 Williams, Joseph M. & Bizup, Joseph. (2013). *Style: Lessons in clarity and grace* (11th ed.). New York: Longman. Lessons Ten, Eleven, and Twelve.
 *Yagoda, Ben. (2011). The elements of clunk. *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Jan. 2). Chronicle.com.
- 10) 6/7: Writing with Clarity and Grace; Workshop
 *March, James G. (1975). Education and the pursuit of optimism. *Texas Tech Journal of Education*, 2:1, 5-17.
 *Gladwell, Malcolm. (2000). The art of failure: Why some people choke and others panic. *New Yorker* (Aug. 21 and 28). Gladwell.com
 *Labaree, David F. (2012). Sermon on educational research. *Bildungsgeschichte: International Journal for the Historiography of Education*, 2:1, 78-87.