

BEM/EC/SS 20: SCIENTIFIC WRITING AND ORAL PRESENTATION IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Winter 2011

COURSE INSTRUCTORS

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CLASS MEETINGS

Wednesdays, 2:00PM - 3:55PM, 315 Baxter.

COURSE WEBSITE

The syllabus as well as weekly announcements will be posted on the class website: <http://www.hss.caltech.edu/~lyariv/SS20.htm>

PREREQUISITES

A paper from a previous class or a very focused idea for a project for which a paper can be written within three weeks at most.

BACKGROUND

This class provides the opportunity for students to improve their written and oral presentation skills in the social sciences. The class satisfies both Caltech's science writing requirement as well as the HSS oral requirement. Students will come prepared with complete drafts of papers from another course or a SURF project, which they will substantially revise and improve for a specific target audience. Alternatively, students will arrive with a well formed idea for a project they plan to work on and a list of relevant papers that they can write up as a research proposal in several weeks. In most cases, the target audience for the

class essays will be the academic community and students will revise their work in line with the expectations and format of a designated peer-reviewed journal in their discipline.

Examples of top peer-reviewed journals in economics are *American Economic Review*, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *Econometrica*, *Journal of Political Economy*, and *Review of Economic Studies* (back issues available at the Caltech library or JSTOR.org, which Caltech subscribes to).

To qualify, papers must be the students' original work and must be in a social science discipline. Alternative target audiences and writing projects (such as business plans) may be considered in consultation with the instructors.

In addition, each student will work closely with an HSS mentor whose own research is close to the student's paper topic. Mentors will supervise and comment on the substance of the paper. Student work will be evaluated jointly by the student's mentor and the course instructors.

Much of the work that goes on in this class will occur in a workshop context, so students should consider attendance mandatory. Students will sometimes meet as a group with the instructors and sometimes individually with mentors or one of the class instructors.

MAIN TASKS

1. Creating a polished paper;
2. Oral presentation of the work;
3. Meeting the requirements of a peer-reviewed journal.

USEFUL READING

Defoe, Tory (2007), "The Truth Is, You Gave a Lousy Talk," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 21.

McCloskey, Donald N. (1983), "The Rhetoric of Economics," *Journal of Economic Literature*, 21:481-517.

Thomson, William (1999), "The Young Person's Guide to Writing Economic Theory," *Journal of Economic Literature*, 37:157-183.

Class Schedule

Week 1 - January 5

- Students will bring 3 copies of their proposed paper or proposed project to the first class, as well as names of two potential mentors from the division
- *Introduction:* Course goals and organizational issues
- *Assignment:* Bring a previous paper to class for revision in SS20; schedule meeting with LY for 10 min discussion for Tuesday, January 11 or Wednesday, January 12

Week 2 - January 12

- *Discussion:* What makes effective scientific writing, targeting appropriate audience level, preliminary plans, oral presentation techniques
- *Assignment:* In-class writing exercise (preliminary writing plan); meet with LY and mentor to go over papers and projects and discuss plan of action

Week 3 - January 19

- *Discussion:* What are you writing? Who is your mentor? Guidelines and expectations, the writing process, the role of writing in producing knowledge
- *Assignment:* Deliver oral presentation with PowerPoint visuals (10 min)

Week 4 - January 26

- *Discussion:* Writing abstracts, working with information sources, avoiding plagiarism, library research tools
- *Assignment:* Brief rhetorical analysis of target journal; identification of model for your project; submit one page abstract to LY and CD **by Friday, January 28**

Week 5 - February 2

- *Discussion:* Strategies for revision, improving language, developing and organizing information, the logic of scientific papers, paraphrasing and summarizing
- *Assignment 1:* Find, cite, and briefly discuss five new sources of information
- *Assignment 2:* Meet with mentor and collect feedback; submit new draft of paper to LY **by Friday, February 4** and schedule 10 min meeting with LY for **Tuesday, February 8 or Wednesday, February 9**

Week 6 – February 9

- *Discussion:* Peer review process and guidelines
- *Assignment 1:* In-class peer review of abstracts and paper excerpt
- *Assignment 2:* Submit revised draft via email to CD **by Friday, February 11**

Week 7 – February 16

- *Assignment/Discussion:* Come to class prepared with notes for peer review

Week 8 – February 23

- *No class meeting*
- *Assignment:* Submit new draft of paper **by Friday, February 25**, to CD, LY, and mentors

Week 9 – March 2

- *Discussion:* Editing, revising, style

Week 10 – March 9

- *Assignment:* Deliver **revised** oral presentation with PowerPoint visuals (10 min)
- **Final draft due** via email to CD, LY, and mentors **by Friday, March 11**