

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

Fall 2009

COURSE INSTRUCTOR

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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 survey 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 the Institute Science Writing Requirement and 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 through Caltech library or JSTOR).

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

Throughout the class, the Hixon Writing Center will be providing detailed tutorials on different aspects of written and oral presentations. 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 advisor and the course instructor.

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 Throughout the Class

1. Creating a polished paper;
2. Oral presentation of the work;
3. Summarizing in varying depths others' papers.

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 (class will meet with CD and LY collectively)

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.

- LY, CD – Overview of class.
- Schedule meeting with LY for 10 mins discussion for Tuesday, 10.6, or Wednesday, 10.7.

Week 2 (class will meet with mentors and LY individually, with CD collectively)

- Mentors and LY – Go over papers and projects and discuss plan of action.
- CD – Theories of oral presentation.

Week 3 (class will meet with CD and LY collectively)

10 min Presentations.

Week 4 (class will meet with CD individually)

- CD – Discussion regarding the writing of abstracts.
- Submit one page abstract of a given paper to LY and CD **by Friday, 10.23.**

Week 5 (class will meet with Hixon tutors individually, with CD collectively)

- Hixon tutors – comments on draft.
- CD – Strategies for effective written presentation.
- Submit new draft of paper to LY **by Friday, 10.30** and **schedule 10 min meeting for Tuesday, 11.3 or Wednesday, 11.4.**

Week 6 (class will meet with LY individually, with CD collectively)

- CD – Peer review of papers.
- LY – comments on draft.

Week 7 (class will meet with CD collectively)

- CD – Strategies for effective oral presentation.
- Submit two page summary of 4 given papers to LY and CD **by Friday, 11.13.**

Week 8 (no class meetings)

Submit new draft of paper **by Friday, 11.20**, to mentors and LY.

Comments will be given by e-mail.

Week 9 (class will meet with Hixon tutors individually, with CD and LY collectively)

- Hixon tutors – comments on draft.
- Happy Thanksgiving!

Week 10 (class will meet with CD and LY collectively)

- CD and LY – 10 min Presentations.

Final draft due by Friday, 12.11.