

MMC 6936: Academic Writing Spring 2023

*(January 3rd version; syllabus is subject to change,
always refer to Canvas for the most recent version)*

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Office Hours: Mondays, 2-3 pm or by appointment. We can meet in person in my office or over Zoom. For either case, please sign up at least 15 minutes before the start time here:

<https://calendly.com/celeste-wagner/office-hours>

Class Time: Tuesdays 10:40 AM - 1:40 PM ([WEIM3028](#))

Course Description and Goals

MMC 6936 is designed to provide graduate students with practical knowledge and skills in various academic writing formats, with the aim of improving their abilities to write for publication and achieve career goals. It is a hands-on, interactive course that focuses on helping students succeed in the academic writing process.

The primary objective of this course is to introduce students to various academic writing formats and assist them in developing the skills and confidence necessary to produce clear, concise, and effective academic writing. To this end, the class will provide students with the knowledge, resources, and tools they need to succeed in academic writing. The course will focus on three types of academic writing products: 1) research writing, 2) other publication writing, and 3) career/professional development materials, including but not limited to social scientific research papers, extended abstracts, conference presentations, letters to journal editors, responses to reviewers, personal statements, CVs, cover letters, and IRB protocols.

Due to the interactive and personalized nature of this seminar, assignments and class materials may be tailored to the individual backgrounds, interests, and career goals of each student. As such, the syllabus is subject to modification in order to maximize its relevance to the specific student cohort.

Course Learning Goals

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Develop a deeper understanding of the conventions of academic writing in the social sciences, with a particular focus on research papers.
- Improve overall writing skills, including clarity, concision, and organization.
- Learn how to effectively incorporate and cite sources in written work.
- Practice writing for different genres and audiences
- Create a strategy for identifying and addressing personal obstacles to productive writing.
- Get to know yourself better as a writer.
- Understand the distinctions between strong quantitative and qualitative writing
- Become aware of how the peer review process operates

- Practice how to give honest and helpful feedback to peers and effectively respond to feedback received
- Communicate research findings clearly and concisely
- Compose important written documents for academic careers, such as personal statements, cover letters, or CVs.

Class Values Around Diversity and Inclusion

The University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications Department of Journalism embraces a commitment toward an intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along several dimensions, including gender identity, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, class, and religion.

It is very important for me that together we create an inclusive learning environment that makes everyone feel comfortable and welcome in class. Many times, learning something new entails feeling uncomfortable and challenging preconceived ideas. This is a desired outcome of any learning environment because it encourages us to think with rigor, fairness, and creativity.

The goal is not to agree on everything or find consensus as a class, but to educate ourselves, and to respectfully engage in discussions about different topics. Thus, curiosity and respect towards different viewpoints, experiences and ideas will not only be a necessary path to succeed in class but also for both personal and intellectual growth. For this, it is essential that we all exercise respect, courtesy, civil dialogue, and empathy towards one another. I am convinced that the diversity that we all bring as a group is a strength and I am committed to making efforts to include class material that reflects a diversity of experiences, contexts, and identities.

Remember that the material that we will read in this class has been written by specific individuals with their own viewpoints. I would like for everyone to feel comfortable sharing your observations and critiques about the material.

Feel free to reach out to me if there is anything that is making you feel uncomfortable in any way or if you have any suggestions on how to build this communal space for all of us to learn together. I look forward to working with all of you to achieve this.

Course Requirements

Course materials:

- As much as possible, the class will be tailored to the individual needs, career stages, and research interests of each student. As such, the reading material will be partially chosen by the students themselves, in addition to being suggested by me after getting to know one another during the first few weeks of the semester.
- The required material will be available through Canvas, either linked or attached as a PDF.
- To be able to access the material through the provided links, you will have to be connected to UF Wi-Fi or the UF network via our **VPN** software if you are off campus. Refer to this [video instruction about how to connect to the VPN](#).
- We will be using a combination of textbook chapters, academic journal articles, book chapters, and nonacademic sources (news articles, videos, documentaries, etc.).

Assignments:

- This is a hands-on course focused on the practice of academic writing. Therefore, there will be frequent assignments geared towards improving skills and knowledge about different academic writing formats.
- Students will read, analyze and critique published academic papers. Some of these assignments will require students to select their own material to analyze, depending on their interests.
- Students will practice writing different sections of a research paper. If students are already working on a research project, it is convenient to work on that material, unless it is a finished draft ready to submit to a conference or journal.
- Students will practice different forms of academic writing related to publishing. For example, letters to journal editors, writing peer reviews, writing responses to reviewers, etc.
- Students will also get familiarized with different forms of career writing, depending on their career goals and stages. For example, cover letters for academic job applications, etc.
- Although the concept of "good writing" is subjective, this course will focus on mastering the most standardized formats of academic writing in the social sciences, with an emphasis on producing clear, concise, and succinct written work.
- In academic settings, meeting deadlines is crucial to the success of any project, and this class is no exception. It is expected that students will adhere to all deadlines set forth in the course syllabus. Failing to meet deadlines is not only detrimental to your own progress, but it can also be unfair to your fellow classmates. If you foresee any issues with meeting a deadline, it is imperative that you inform me as soon as possible to make arrangements.

Class attendance and participation:

- Students should come to class having read/listened/watched all class material for that class.
- Students are allowed to miss 1 class without medical justification but are expected to notify me as soon as possible.
- This is a small class, and we will do activities in class, so your engagement and participation are crucial for the class success.
- If you are attending a conference in person and must miss class, please let me know as soon as possible.
- Class participation won't be graded, but it is highly encouraged.

Students Requiring Accommodations

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the [Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluation

At the end of the class, you will have to complete a course evaluation online via GatorEvals. Course evaluations are very important, as they will help me plan and adjust the syllabus for next iterations of this class. They are also important for future students who will indirectly benefit from your feedback. It is expected that students will offer professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course. [Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available](#). Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or [online](#). [Summaries of course evaluation results](#) are available to students online.

Academic Honesty

It is expected that all students will respect the [UF student honor code and conduct code](#). The following are some of the potential issues that are particularly pertinent when writing academic texts:

- Misrepresentation: any practice that aims at deceiving in relation to academic practices. For example, lying about data collection processes.
- Fabrication: Cases of falsification of original or third-party data.
- Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the act of using someone else's work or ideas as your own, without proper attribution or citation. This can take the form of copying and pasting text from a source, paraphrasing a source without giving credit, or using someone else's ideas or research in your work without acknowledging the original source. When in doubt, please review the plagiarism guide by UF's Library: <https://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/copyright/plagiarism>

Assignments

In the class, we will do the following assignments. For each one of them, students will receive specific and clear instructions on Canvas, as well as resources and/or examples that they can draw from.

Research writing:

1. **Summary of existent research project:** students are required to submit a summary of a research project that they intend to work on throughout the semester. This may be a paper for which data has already been collected but has not yet been written, a research proposal for a future paper, or a paper that could potentially be included in their MA/PhD dissertation. It is important to note that the project summary should not be a fully completed manuscript ready for submission. The purpose of this assignment is to allow students to consider a project at the beginning of the class that can be used for various assignments throughout the semester. It is recommended that students choose an existing project in order to make meaningful progress on a topic that will be valuable for their academic advancement. In the event that a student is unsure about how to select an appropriate project, office hours will be available for discussion and guidance. (~200-400 words)

2. **Analysis of published research papers:** Based on shared interests between students in the class, we will select papers to analyze individually before the class and collectively during the class. We will read qualitative and quantitative papers in the social sciences. Students will have to hand in a one-page analysis based on guiding questions about the writing style and structure of the paper. The goal of these assignments is to identify the standardized format of academic writing when it comes to social scientific research papers. (~500-600 words each)
3. **Writing abstract of existent paper:** Students will have to read a paper I will select, but without reading the abstract. Then, they will have to write the abstract themselves. Students make a commitment *not* to google the abstract in advance. The goal of this assignment is to become more proficient in the reading of academic papers and in the writing of abstracts. (200 words)
4. **Writing a literature review:** Students will write a literature review for a social scientific research paper. Ideally, they work on their selected project from assignment #1. Students should discuss with me in advance during office hours the literature they will be reading, sources they are including, etc. Students will use the examples analyzed in assignment #2 to work on their own project. The goal of this assignment is to become more proficient in the reading and writing of literature reviews for social scientific papers. (~1000 words).
5. **Writing a methods section:** Students will write a methods section for a manuscript of a social scientific research paper. Ideally, they work on their selected project from assignment #1. Students will use the examples analyzed in assignment #2 to work on their own project. The goal of this assignment is to become more proficient in the reading and writing of methods sections of social scientific research papers. Word count will vary whether it is a quantitative or qualitative project.
6. **Writing an introduction:** Students will write the introduction section for a manuscript of a social scientific research paper. Ideally, they work on their selected project from assignment #1. The goal of this assignment is to become more proficient in the reading and writing of introduction sections of social scientific research papers. (~500 words)

Other publication writing:

7. **Writing a cover letter to a journal editor for the first and R1 submissions:** Students will write a letter to a journal editor for a first submission of a manuscript, and for the submission of a revised version of the manuscript, after receiving a “revise and resubmit.” The goal of this activity is to become familiarized and develop your own personal template on how to communicate with a journal editor.
8. **Writing a referee report for a journal submission and responding to one:** Students will write an alleged anonymous peer review about an unpublished manuscript. Ideally,

students will review a classmate’s work submitted for assignments #4 to #6. Students will then write a letter to respond to their peer review as if they had addressed the changes suggested by the reviewer after an “R&R.”

Career/professional development writing:

- 9. **CV:** Students will write their own CVs depending on their career goals and stages and will review a classmate’s CV.
- 10. **Cover letter for job application OR public scholarship:** Students can choose between writing a cover letter for a job application in the academic job market OR write a research-based piece for a media publication (for e.g., something that could be published at *The Conversation*.)

Grading

Deadlines and grades

Assignment	Deadlines	Final grade percentage
#1 Summary of existent research project	January 17	5%
#2 Analysis of published research papers	January 24 (paper #1) January 31 (paper #2) February 7 (paper #3)	15%
#3 Writing abstract of existent paper	February 14	10%
#4 Writing a literature review	February 28	15%
#5 Writing a methods section	March 7	10%
#6 Writing an introduction	March 21	10%
#7 Writing a cover letter to a journal editor for the first and R1 submissions	March 28	5%
#8 Writing a peer review for a journal submission and responding to a peer review	April 4 (peer review) April 11 (response to peer review)	15%
#9 CV	April 18	5%
#10 Cover letter OR public scholarship	April 25	10%

Grading Scale

Letter grade	Percent	Letter grade	Percent	Letter grade	Percent	Letter grade	Percent
		B+	89-87%	C+	79-77%	D+	69-67%

A	100-93%	B	86-83%	C	76-73%	D	66-63%
A-	92-90%	B-	82-80%	C-	72-70%	D-	62-60%

Class Schedule

Class 1: January 10:

- Introduction to the class.
- Basic structure of a social scientific research paper.
- Students schedule office hours' time to discuss research project ideas.

Class 2: January 17:

- In-class analysis of research paper structure.
- Each student shares their research project ideas for the semester. Group discussion.

Class 3: January 24:

- In-class analysis of paper #1.
- Focus on general structure of a research paper.
- Special attention to the writing style and structure of the abstract and the introduction.

Class 4: January 31:

- In-class analysis of paper #2.
- Focus on literature review and methods section.

Class 5: February 7:

- In-class analysis of paper #3.
- Focus on findings.
- Revision of abstract structure for assignment.

Class 6: February 14:

- Analysis of discussion sections of papers #1, #2, and #3.

Class 7: February 21:

- Revision of literature review structure for the assignment.
- Citation styles and practices.
- Group activity on students' literature review assignment.

Class 8: February 28:

- Revision of methods section for the assignment.
- Group activity on students' assignment on the methods section.

Class 9: March 7

- Revision of an introduction section for the assignment.
- How to write a research proposal.

Class 10: March 21:

- The peer review process. Good and bad practices.
- How to write a cover letter to a journal editor for a first submission of a manuscript and after obtaining a referee report.

Class 11: March 28:

- The peer review process.
- How to write a referee report.
- How to respond to a referee report.

Class 12: April 4

- Group activity about each student's research projects.
- Peer review discussions before assignment.

Class 13: April 11

- The curriculum vitae in academia. Good and bad practices.
- Analysis of examples.

Class 14: April 18:

- The cover letter for academic job applications.
- Public scholarship publications. Good and bad practices.
- Analysis of examples of each writing format in preparation for final assignment.

Class 15: April 25: Conclusion