Sociology Department Writing Plan

Writing Emphasis Courses
In keeping with the liberal arts tradition, we believe it is important for students to practice writing about a broad range of topics for a wide variety of audiences. To support this value, no student can fulfill the writing requirement at Coe by taking courses solely in sociology. Of course, we also believe it is important for students to learn and practice writing that is disciplinary-specific. Thus, all courses taught in our department generally involve a good deal of writing. However, we offer three core courses in which we pay explicit attention to matters of writing in sociology; these three courses carry the Writing Emphasis designation:
- SOC-235 Methods of Sociological Research
- SOC-450 Sociological Theory
- SOC-464 Capstone Seminar in Sociology

Types of Writing
In each of these Writing Emphasis courses, we focus on at least two of the following three types of writing:
- Academic
- Reflective
- Professional

Academic Writing
The main purpose of academic written communication in sociology is to demonstrate knowledge – either knowledge/understanding of someone else's ideas or new knowledge created by the writer. Most of this writing involves students making evidence-based arguments, which are typically grounded in existing theory and literature, that apply the sociological perspective to make assertions about social phenomena.

In sociological academic writing, we primarily value:
- *Use of Evidence*: The writing that most sociologists engage in relies on evidence to make and support claims. This evidence should be detailed and appropriate to the claim.
- *Organization:* Good academic writing in sociology should have clear thesis statements that structure the entirety of the paper. Organization also includes good use of transitions or subheadings, clear and thorough introductions and conclusions, and a logical progression of the argument throughout the paper.
- *Clarity, Accuracy, and Precision:* To be effective, information presented in academic writing should be clearly and accurately conveyed. References should also be appropriately cited.

The texts that sociologists create in the realm of academic writing include:
- Critical reviews of existing scholarship
- Empirical testing of existing theories
- Descriptions of measurement techniques/processes used to gather data
- Analyses of results derived from data collection
- Analytical memos

- Research papers
- Reports
- Policy or program evaluations

In order to help students learn the skills necessary to write academically, sociology students will routinely engage in the following types of activities:
- Frequent, repetitive writing opportunities (e.g., regular response papers or weekly reading memos)
- Scaffolded assignments (e.g., students turn in one part of a research paper at a time—literature review, methodology, analysis, discussion)
- Reading workshops (e.g., discussion of the style, not just the content, of the assigned reading)
- Research workshops (e.g., presentations and discussions on how to locate appropriate sources, how to conduct interviews, etc.)
- Peer-review workshops (e.g., students review each other's' work and provide suggestions for improvement)

The type of academic writing students complete in sociology courses includes:
- Reading responses
- Analytical memos
- Argumentative essays
- Applications of existing theories to present-day social phenomena
- Book reviews
- Literature reviews
- Research papers
- Research proposals

Reflective Writing
This type of writing is less directed toward an external audience and is more useful for helping the author think through complex issues or problems. Reflective writing is also useful for helping the author make personal connections with texts, ideas, and experiences. This type of writing can help authors to better articulate to themselves how their knowledge or understanding of the social world has changed, grown, or adapted to new information.

In reflective writing, we value:
- *Engagement*: This type of writing should demonstrate thoughtfulness and consideration of the issue at hand.
- *Self-reflection:* The most important part of reflective writing is the reflection. This requires the author to turn their attention inward. For example, what have I learned? Where am I still struggling? What should my next step be? Reflection doesn't necessarily have to involve assessment of affect, but this can sometimes be useful. For example, how did this experience make me *feel*?
- *Detail*: Reflective writing should be very descriptive and detailed in order to support the claims being made. It doesn't necessarily require evidence from outside sources, but statements should be illustrated by internal thoughts, feelings, or changes in behavior.

The texts that sociologists create in the realm of reflective writing include:
- Teaching and personal statements
- Research memos that reflect on process and emerging ideas
- Opinion pieces

In order to help students learn the skills necessary to write reflectively, sociology students will routinely engage in the following types of activities:
- Discussion-based reflection with classmates
- Responses to structured prompts or questions
- Frequent, repetitive reflection opportunities (e.g., weekly reading responses)
- Revisiting prior reflections at a later date (e.g., examining initial expectations for a project once the project is complete)
- Assignments with low-stakes grading (so that students feel comfortable being vulnerable and honest)

The type of reflective writing students complete in sociology courses includes:
- Reflections on assigned readings
- Reflections on class field-trips or other interactive experiences
- Research process memos
- Fake obituaries (designed to get students thinking about what they want for their lives)
- Advice memos (for themselves or others—e.g., next year's seniors)
- Self-assessment of their own engagement and/or written work

Professional Writing
One of our department goals is to prepare students for life after college in the so-called "real world." For this reason, it is important to prepare students for writing in a practical, professional manner. Professional writing tends to be less discipline-specific and often more public-facing.

In professional writing, we value:
- *Clarity*: Most of this type of writing is not meant to be read by other sociologists. That means that professional writing should be free of discipline-specific jargon.
- *Brevity*: Professional writing should be concise and directly to the point.
- *Awareness of Audience*: Consideration of audience is key in this type of writing. Most of this writing is done for a very specific purpose (rather than the more abstract goal of "demonstrating understanding").
- *Polish*: Because this is public-facing writing, it is imperative that it is free of typos and grammatical errors. Professional writing should also be formatted in a way that is aesthetically pleasing to the reader.

The texts sociologists create in the realm of professional writing are:
- Cover letters and resumes
- Grant applications
- Applications for doing research with human subjects

- Documentation for human subjects (informed consent forms, debriefing summaries, recruitment scripts)
- Opinion pieces

In order to help students learn the skills necessary to write professionally, sociology students will routinely engage in the following types of activities:
- Discussions with experts regarding the construction of particular documents (e.g., representatives from C3, IRB)
- Examinations of examples of others' professional writing in the field
- Reading op-eds written by sociologists
- Practice writing resumes and cover letters contoured to actual jobs they are considering
- Practice writing IRB applications and consent forms for research projects
- Practice writing grant proposals

The type of professional writing students complete in sociology courses includes:
- Resumes and cover letters
- IRB applications
- Consent forms
- Debriefing statements and recruitments scripts for research projects
- Op-eds for newspapers
- Grant proposals