

CMN 529: Writing in Graduate School

Summer Session II, 2018

Tuesdays/Thursdays, 2-4:50 pm

4007 Lincoln Hall

Professor Cara Finnegan (please call me Cara; use pronouns she/her/hers)

Offices: 4098 Lincoln Hall (faculty office); 3004 Lincoln Hall (assoc. head office)

Phone: 217-333-1855 (office; voice mail)

Office Hours: TR 1-1:50 pm or by appt.

E-Mail: caraf@illinois.edu (best way to reach me)

Course Web Site: <https://learn.illinois.edu/course/view.php?id=30117>

Library Resources for Department of Communication students:

<https://www.library.illinois.edu/commedia/>

Course Description

Communication researchers write, but we tend not to think of ourselves as *writers*. Graduate students train as researchers, but their training seldom involves systematic attention to writing. This course invites students to explore what it means to think of themselves as writers. We will identify and learn from models of scholarly writing in different areas of the field; explore and try out writing practices that foster creativity and productivity; and dissect key genres of scholarly writing (e.g., the journal article, the literature review). The course will give you valuable tools for developing as a writer in graduate school and beyond.

This seminar is designed for all graduate students in the Department of Communication, regardless of area, and is especially appropriate for students still in coursework. *Note that this is NOT a course about how to write a dissertation, how to do research in your area of the field, how to publish, how to use proper bibliographic style, or how to use correct English grammar.* While the processes and practices we explore will no doubt be useful for these concerns and will ideally have an influence on other writing activities you engage in, our focus will be squarely on *writing as a process, practice, and product* that shapes nearly everything we do as communication scholars.

- In exploring *process*, we will examine the actions or steps you take in order to achieve your writing goals. Germane process questions include: When do you write? Where do you write? What behaviors or habits of writing have worked for you in the past? Which ones haven't? How do you make time to write? What myths about writing do you subscribe to, and how do they affect the ways you think about yourself as a writer?
- Attention to *practice* invites us to think about ways to improve our writing for the benefit of diverse audiences of readers. Here, we will take up questions such as, How is a good scholarly argument structured? What does a good introduction look like? How can I learn to express myself clearly and precisely? How can I address complex ideas while avoiding jargon?

- Finally, we will discuss the *products* of writing, both yours and others'. We will seek out exemplars or models in our own areas of the field and analyze them, dissecting their structure, language, and framing in order to help us improve our own writing projects.

Important Note About Our Process

A key component of this course involves your selection of a previous project (most likely, a seminar paper you wrote for another class) to work with across the term. This is the foundation of the assignment described below, "My Summer Project" (hereafter, MSP). The MSP might be a paper you want to revise to submit to a conference, a journal, or grant proposal. It should *not* be a new project, or a project that needs substantially more research or data collection. For the purposes of our course, your focus with the MSP needs to be on working with the draft writing you already have, not generating a lot of new writing or doing other research tasks. If you cannot identify a suitable MSP, or prefer to spend your summer generating new research/data rather than revising something you already have, then this course may not be useful for you right now.

Learning Outcomes

As a result of taking this course, you will:

- learn skills for moving an initial draft of a project (most likely, a seminar paper) to the next stage, whether that be conference submission, journal submission, or something else;
- begin to think of writing as a key part of the entire research process, rather than something that comes into play only at the end;
- identify the processes, practices, and habits of writing that have helped you or hindered you in your academic work up to this point;
- learn how to analyze and learn from others' scholarly writing and employ exemplars as models for your own work;
- understand the unique demands of different genres and common parts of scholarly writing such as the abstract, the literature review, and the introduction;
- begin to think about how your research tells a story of relevance to particular audiences in the field;
- improve your revision and editing skills in order to become a more stylish (yes, *stylish!*) academic writer.

Readings

This semester we will read four books as well as additional book chapters and articles. All of our readings will focus on our main questions of process, practice, and/or product. Keep in mind that reading assignments will be paired with writing assignments, meaning that you will need to leave time between class sessions to both read and write in order to be prepared for the next class. We will use class time to do activities related

to our readings, so it's a good idea to bring writing utensils (pen, notebook, laptop, whatever) with you to every class session.

- Patricia Goodson, *Becoming an Academic Writer: 50 Exercises for Paced, Productive, and Powerful Writing*, 2nd ed. (Sage, 2017)
- Joli Jensen, *Write No Matter What: Advice for Academics* (University of Chicago Press, 2017)
- Helen Sword, *Stylish Academic Writing* (Harvard University Press, 2012)
- Helen Sword, *Air & Light & Time & Space: How Successful Academics Write* (Harvard University Press, 2017). Available free at our library as an e-book.

Copies of Goodson, Sword, *Stylish* and Jensen have been placed on reserve at the Communications Library if you choose not to purchase them.

See Moodle for e-versions of the other reading assignments listed on our schedule.

Assignments

Unlike a traditional graduate seminar where you read a lot, talk about what you read, and then compose a project at the end of the semester, this course will involve day-to-day reading and writing activities in class and outside of class. It is essential that you keep up with these if you want to get the maximum benefits from this course's focus on practice and process.

Students will earn a total of 500 points for the semester, divided this way:

- Commonplace book (100 points). Commonplace books used to be, well, *common*. The commonplace book can take many forms, but at its most foundational it is a book in which its owner writes out compelling quotations or ideas from what one has read, makes a note or two about why these ideas are of value, and then indexes these ideas in some way for easy reference later. Part notetaking device, part memory aid, and part pre-writing exercise, a book of *loci communes*, or "common places," ties the activities of reading and writing together in ways that improve your experience of both. In this course, you will create a commonplace book of material you glean from our readings and activities (hard copy or electronic, your choice – but it needs to be something you can turn in/give me access to for evaluation). For each class period that you do not have another writing assignment due, you should:
 - Copy out 2-3 quotations from at least half of the readings for that day in your commonplace book, accompanied by two or three sentences about why you chose each quotation, what's striking about it, what questions it raises for you, what makes it interesting or confusing, how it links to other things we've read or talked about, etc. (Don't forget to document page numbers!)

- Then, choose one or two keywords for each quotation and “tag” your entry with those. (You will use these to create an index of your entries as you go.)
- You should bring your commonplace book (in whatever form) to class with you each day, because we will use your entries to help shape each day’s discussion. Expect that I will spot-check a few times during the term to make sure you are keeping up with them. You will turn in the completed commonplace book at the end of the semester.

Ultimately, the commonplace book will give you a record of your thinking and progress in the course. And, handy for our purposes this summer, it also offers you a new writing/notetaking practice to try out in order to see if it may work for you long-term. (Note: see examples of commonplace books and articles about keeping them on Moodle.)

- Goal-setting papers and meetings (50 points). At the beginning of the term, you will draft a 2-3 page autobiography about your experiences with scholarly writing thus far, your choice of My Summer Project, and your goals for the course. In a 20-30 minute meeting, we will discuss and potentially revise these to make sure they are in line with what you can expect in the course and what the course can do for you. At the end of the term, we will repeat the process. You will draft a second statement about how you met your goals over the summer, and you will set 2-3 concrete writing goals to work on after the course is over. We will then meet briefly during finals week to discuss and explore ways to take the course with you.
- Writing practice activities (75 points). Throughout the term we will do activities both in class and outside of class to give you practice working with all of the topics we are engaging, including analysis of exemplars/models, structuring papers and articles, writing introductions, literatures reviews, etc. My evaluation of this work will include making sure you are fully engaged in these practice activities in and outside of class, as well as assessing the overall quality of your participation in class. You will turn in selected examples of your in-class activities with your final portfolio (see below). (For an outline of my expectations for class participation, see below.)
- Writing process activities and report (75 points). During the week class does not meet (July 3, July 5), you will select two of the following activities to try. Then, you will write a 5-8 page report discussing your experiences with these new processes and how/whether/in what ways they worked/didn’t work for you: Pomodoro method; scholarly morning pages; writing date; solo or group writing “marathon” (multiple hours over a single day); writing retreat (solo or with others); writing group (2-3 people sharing drafts and offering feedback on writing); possibly others to be determined.

- My Summer Project final portfolio (200 points)
 - The goal of the final portfolio is that it should give me several examples of how you have implemented what you have learned about writing this summer.
 - Your portfolio should be turned in on paper in a folder. It should contain examples of the different kinds of work you have done on your MSP throughout the summer. It should include: your final goal-setting paper; the initial draft of the MSP you started with; a sample three-page, single-spaced grant or fellowship proposal about your project; a sample abstract and introduction to a journal article based on your project; and an additional revised and edited section of your choice that shows substantial progress in writing from the initial version of the MSP.

Seminar Participation

You are successfully participating in the seminar when you (a) read carefully and bring ideas from your commonplace book to class; (b) engage productively in class—that is, ask questions, raise issues, deliberate with others in the room; (c) listen and respond to others critically yet charitably; and (d) avoid behaviors that block productive classroom conversation, such as monopolizing discussion, remaining silent, or offering comments that are merely informational or (un)appreciative.

Administrative Miscellany

- If you may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, feel free to discuss your specific needs with me.
- Students who are found to have violated the University's academic integrity policies should expect to fail the course.
- Barring serious family or medical emergencies, I will give no incompletes for this course.
- Laptops, tablets, etc., are always welcome in class for notetaking, referring to readings, or other class activities. I reserve the right to declare "screens down" at any point in class. Please set phones on silent mode during class.
- We will take a 10-minute break halfway through each session. If you need to step out of the classroom briefly outside of that time, free free to do so quietly.
- You are welcome to use whatever style guide (e.g., APA, Chicago) best reflects norms in your area of the field. The choice of style guide is itself very closely tied to how we write, as we will discuss in class. But the key is that your style guide usage needs to be accurate. In your writing for this course, work to make sure you are conforming to a specific style guide rather than simply freestyling. I personally have published in APA, MLA, and Chicago, so I recognize the basics of most style guides. ☺

Reading/Assignment Schedule

Key:

SAW=Sword, *Stylish Academic Writing*

Jensen=Jensen, *Write No Matter What*

Goodson=Goodson, *Becoming an Academic Writer*

AIR=Sword, *Air & Light & Time & Space*

MOO= reading is a link or PDF on Moodle

6/12 Introduction part one: Thinking of ourselves as writers

Before class: review syllabus; get books; think about ideas for your MSP

6/14 Introduction part two: How do you write right now?

Campus resources for grad student writers: the Writer's Workshop

Turn in autobiography/goal-setting paper

Before class read: SAW 3-31; AIR ix-10, 153-168; take BASE quiz at

<http://writersdiet.com/base.php> and report/reflect on results in your autobiography

WK OF 6/18: SIGN UP FOR 20 MIN. MEETING WITH CF TO DISCUSS GOALS

6/19 Writing Habits

Before class read: Jensen xi-74; Goodson 21-52; AIR 11-55, 90-101

6/21 Telling the Story of Your Research

Before class read: SAW 63-98, 147-158; Goodson 223-231; Jensen 77-81;

MOO: Belcher 43-66

6/26 Writing Strategies for Grants and Fellowships

Guest: Ken Vickery, Director of Graduate College Office of External Fellowships
Ken will lead a two-hour workshop designed for grad students in the humanities and social sciences. Workshop description: "We explain what reviewers want to see in a winning proposal, and we dissect a proposal into its component parts, offering guidance on how to compose each part."

6/28 The Bigger Picture: GradMap Workshop

Guest: Emily Wuchner, Graduate College Career Development Office

Emily will lead a 90-minute workshop designed to help you set specific goals.

Workshop description: "Graduate school is full of right-now expectations (papers, exams) and long-term hopes (thesis or dissertation, a great job). But it can be tough to bridge the gaps between today and someday. To make the most of your time in graduate school, it is crucial that you set medium-term goals and make plans to achieve them. Whether you hope to publish in a journal, land an internship, or teach your own course, the best way to get from where you are to where you want to be is to make a map and stick to it. . . . In this hands-on workshop, students use the

GradMap Professional Development Process to set 6-12 month goals, identify skills needed to achieve those goals, and make concrete plans to develop in those areas by undertaking specific activities.”

- 7/3-5 No Class This Week. Complete writing process activities/report assignment to turn in during class on 7/10. Ahead of doing the activities and report read Jensen 131-148; AIR 123-146
- 7/10 Framing an Argument/Creating Structure
Before class read: SAW 99-111, 122-134; MOO: Belcher 82-92; MOO Belcher 171-185
- 7/12 Introductions and Conclusions
Before class read: MOO: Belcher 202-218; Goodson 147-171, 203-222
- 7/17 Crafting the Literature Review
Before class read: MOO: Becker, “Terrorized by the Literature”; MOO: Belcher 140-163; MOO: Hayot, “Showing Your Iceberg”; MOO: “Seven Ways to Survive a Lit Review”; MOO: “Six Steps to Hack Your Literature Pile”; MOO: http://guides.library.illinois.edu/lit_review
- 7/19 Citation Practices
Before class read: SAW 135-146; MOO: Hayot, “Citational Practice”; MOO: Yong, “I Spent Two Years...”; MOO: Chakravartty et al, “#CommunicationSoWhite
- 7/24 Handling Feedback
Before class read: Jensen 93-104; MOO: Goodson 87-106
- 7/26 Revising, Editing, and Proofreading
Before class read: SAW 35-62, 98-134; MOO: Williams, selections from *Style*
- 7/31 Students’ Choice (topic TBD)
- 8/2 Final class: evaluations, discussion of goal-setting
- SIGN UP FOR 20 MIN. WRAP-UP MEETING WITH CF THIS WEEK
- 8/6 Final portfolio and final commonplace book due to CF in 4098 LH between 3-5 pm