

GOV 391R – Research Colloquium: Writing and Publishing in Political Science
(Fall 2024)

Associate Professor Kenneth Greene

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Office hours: T 11-2 in BAT 4.112 or online. Book appts. at <https://kgreene-0.youcanbook.me/>

Course meets: TH 12:30-3:30 BAT 5.102

Unique: GOV 37540

Course Description

Effective writing can make the difference between an acceptance for publication and a rejection, between convincing your reader and nagging skepticism, and between landing your dream job and wondering why your Earth-shattering insights fell on deaf ears. As we all know, social science writing would benefit from an injection of style, but much of what makes for effective writing in our discipline concerns clarity, organization, pacing, and the logical application of your preferred research methods.

Traditionally, graduate programs assume that students pick up these skills over time. Maybe so, but a dedicated course designed to improve writing while you advance your own project (probably) can't hurt.

This year, we will try a two-track approach, in deference to the recently shortened timeline for defending a dissertation prospectus. You will select your preferred track before the start of classes and stick to it throughout the semester.

Track 1: Prepare an existing piece of writing for submission

Students begin the semester with a piece of *completed* writing that is not quite ready for primetime. For instance, you might have a seminar paper that you want to revise into a journal submission, a dissertation chapter that needs revising before your supervisor is willing to accept it, or a full draft of a dissertation prospectus to be transformed into a final one that will make your committee swoon.

Track 2: Write a dissertation prospectus from an already advanced idea

Students begin the semester with a fully vetted and worked out research question, not just a theme or area of inquiry, and write a dissertation prospectus during the semester. Arriving at a research question requires serious work and must be cleared with your likely dissertation supervisor before the semester begins. Starting with a theme or switching questions during the semester means you will lose much of what this course can offer and will struggle to complete the assignments. At the start of the semester, students should also have read the literature relevant to their research question and have considered the deficiencies or blind spots in these studies that leave space for their dissertation project to make a new contribution. Students who pursue track 2 should be prepared to dedicate *significantly* more than the typical amount of time set aside for a graduate seminar.

I adore working with students on their prospectuses. At the same time, this a writing course and doing the background research and thinking necessary to generate a research question does not mainly involve writing.

If you choose to write a dissertation prospectus from scratch, I will ask you for two items by **August 26**.

1. A document that states the research question and a list of the main existing arguments (with citations) relevant to your question. The research question should be framed as either a "why" question if you are focused on explaining an outcome (i.e., "why are incumbent reelection rates so high?" or "what causes the breakdown of democratic regimes?") or a "what are the effects of X on Y" question, mainly if you are planning experimental work (i.e., "what is the effect of intergroup contact on political polarization?"). If you find yourself asking a "how" question that begs a descriptive answer, go back to the drawing board.
2. An email from your dissertation supervisor (or likely supervisor) indicating that your research question has been vetted and that they see a fruitful path forward.

As you either refine your existing work or write a new prospectus, you will learn typical and effective ways of organizing research articles and proposals, the logical and aesthetically pleasing ways of presenting material associated with standard research methods in the field, how to respond to typical critiques of those methods, and the skills for writing brief communications that are important for advancing your career (e.g., grant proposals, job letters, R&R letters, and peer reviews).

Format

During most of the semester, we will use class time to discuss core themes in effective social science writing, some of which touch on organization and style and others of which touch on research methods. We will use the first hour or so to discuss general issues associated with the session's theme and the remaining two hours to discuss individual projects. It is very important that we all work to create a constructive atmosphere and participate actively in helping improve others' projects. The last few weeks of the semester are dedicated to student presentations and peer review.

The course includes significant out-of-class writing. Students will set writing goals and a timeline at the beginning of the semester. I will give written or oral feedback throughout the semester. In addition to the weekly assignments, I will ask students to rewrite portions of their project as we work through challenging sections. The timeline for these rewrites is variable but as a general guide, you might expect to turn in rewrites about every three weeks (in addition to the weekly assignments on the syllabus).

The reading load is light so that you can dedicate significant time to your own writing. However, it will often be helpful for you to read or at least skim other materials to unpack how other authors deal with situations like those you will confront in your own work. I routinely return to books or articles I recall liking or to major works in an area of literature to review how they organized their literature critique or how they deal with a pesky concept. You should plan to do the same as you develop your own writing.

Students should meet with the instructor in office hours about every other week. Students pursuing track 2 should also meet regularly with their likely dissertation supervisor.

Grading

- Active participation in seminar discussion (20%)
- Presentation (15%). Students will create a presentation on their project, including word-for-word text and a PowerPoint presentation, to be presented in-class during the final three weeks of the semester. Products to be graded include the text and PowerPoint for the presentation, and the verbal in-class presentation itself.
- Peer evaluation (10%). We will do a lot of peer evaluation throughout the semester that will be part of the grade for active participation in seminar discussion; however, for this particular assignment, students will read an advanced draft of a peer's work and submit a review to me (and your peer). Your job will be that of a journal reviewer – pointed, honest, and constructive without pulling punches. I will play the role of editor. I will read the review and add my own comments in a cover letter. Authors will receive both the peer review and my editor's letter. Prospectus writers can opt out of peer review and just make writing product 65% of the course grade.
- Writing product (55%). This will include four elements: a) the paper, prospectus, or chapter you work on for the semester; b) progress toward the final product as set out in a personalized timeline; c) the weekly assignments; and d) rewrites and tailored exercises that I may ask you to do during the semester to help spur progress.

Some details about written work

- Please double space.
- Number your pages and put your name somewhere on the document.
- Please use 12-point font.

Readings

- The reading is light because the emphasis is on producing your own written work.
- Readings will be uploaded to the course Canvas page.

COVID-19 protocols

- Office hours include in-person and online options.
- Please let me know if your personal circumstances require accommodations for safety.
- COVID-19 information and resources are available at <https://protect.utexas.edu/>

SCHEDULE

Week 1. Structuring papers/articles and proposals (August 29)

Themes

- Overview of the course
- Get to know each other's writing goals for the semester
- Presentation and discussion of guides to writing papers/articles and prospectuses
- Creation of personalized timelines for writing goals during the semester

Readings

- Thomas E. Cronin, *Writing as Performing and Political Art*, 2nd edition, Introduction.
- Various authors' brief comments on the craft of writing.
- Kenneth F. Greene "How to Organize Political Science Journal Articles", 2016.
- Kenneth F. Greene "Suggested Outline for Dissertation Proposals", 2010.
- This syllabus

Assignments

- If you haven't already done so, please send me as much the following as you can before the first session: 1) what piece of writing do you want to work on this semester - is it a paper, prospectus, chapter, or something else? 2) what is your goal with this piece of writing? 3) what is the title and a 200-word (or less) abstract? If you are working on a prospectus for the first time, make up an aspirational title and abstract; 4) how much work do you think it needs before it is ready for prime time?

Week 2. Selecting questions and making arguments (September 5)

Themes

- What makes for a good question? How "big" should a question be? Where is the sweet spot between innovation and "normal science"?
- How do you find/discover/intuit a good question?
- How do good questions relate to the literature, the "real world", your interests/passions, and the mundane question of feasibility?
- Core characteristics of research questions: a) descriptive vs. causal questions, b) causes of effects vs. the effects of causes.
- Once you have a question, what are the general qualities that make for a good argument?

Readings

- John Gerring, *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework* 2nd edition. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012: 37-73.
- Craig Loehle "A Guide to Increased Creativity in Research: Inspiration or Perspiration?" *BioScience* 40(2), 1990: 123-129.

- Various authors, "Big, Unanswered Questions in Comparative Politics," APSA-CP, Newsletter of The Organized Section in Comparative Politics of the American Political Science Association, pp 6-16. Read a selection.
http://www.benjaminbsmith.net/uploads/9/0/0/6/9006393/origins_apsa-cp.pdf
- Ayse Bersel "To Come Up with a Good Idea, Start by Imagining the Worst Idea Possible" *Harvard Business Review*, Aug 16, 2017. <https://hbr.org/2017/08/to-come-up-with-a-good-idea-start-by-imagining-the-worst-idea-possible>

Assignment

- Due Wednesday September 4 by 5pm.
- Track 1 students: Write down your research question and draw a causal graph of your argument. You can draw it on paper and take a picture or draw it in a program like PowerPoint. This assignment may take more time than you initially expect, but don't worry if you are still wrestling with your argument – that's what this exercise is all about. You may go through several causal graphs during the semester. For reference, see Gerring, *Social Science Methodology* 2012: 228-230. Unlike in his representation, label your variables and specify whether the relationships are positive (with a +) or negative (with a -) and, where it isn't intuitive, list scores on the variables. Make sure to include intervening variables associated with proposed causal mechanisms. (Recall that causal mechanisms translate causes into effects and operate at a lower level of analysis than the proposed cause.) In your causal graph, you may focus only on your argument or you may additionally include potential confounding variables and variables associated with rival arguments with which you will need to contend.
- Track 2 students: Write down your research question and up to two alternative research questions if you are not completely settled on the main one yet. For each research question, write a note that includes what you like about the question as formulated and what you dislike. For instance, one version of your question may be sharp and focused but might leave out important elements of your theme that you hope to study. Another version of your question might encompass more of your theme but is too vague to craft a research plan that can provide an answer.

Recommended readings

- William J. McGuire, "Creative Hypothesis Generating in Psychology: Some Useful Heuristics" *Annual Review of Psychology* 1997, 48: 1-30.
- Murray Davis. "That's Interesting: Towards a Phenomenology of Sociology and a Sociology of Phenomenology" *Philosophical Social Sciences* 1, 1971: 309-344.
- Jack Oliver. *The Incomplete Guide to the Art of Discovery*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- Charles Lave and James March. *An Introduction to Models in the Social Sciences*. University Press of America, Inc.; Reprint edition (September 27, 1993).
- P.B. Medawar. *Advice to a Young Scientist*. Harper Colophon, Basic Books; Revised ed. edition (July 15, 1981).
- John Gerring, "What Makes a Concept Good? A Criterial Framework for Understanding Concept Formation in the Social Sciences" *Polity* 31, 3 (Spring, 1999), pp. 357-393.

Week 3. Common criticisms to commonly used methods and how to respond (Sept 12)

Themes

- Each research method in the social sciences has characteristic weaknesses. Readers will raise a set of standard concerns. How can you anticipate and respond to those concerns in your writing?
- Experiments: what about external validity and causal mechanisms?
- Large N: what to say about endogeneity concerns, measurement, and possibly missing causal mechanisms?
- Small N: how does one deal with causal identification and generalizability concerns?

Assignment

- Due Wednesday September 11 by 5pm.
- Track 1: Think about the methods in your project. Are you using the best method(s) to answer your research question? Are you maximizing its strengths? What are its weaknesses and how much do they damage your ability to draw conclusions/adjudicate between rival hypotheses? Do you deal with their weaknesses head-on or try to sweep them under the rug? If you did the former, how much would it damage your argument and how could you repair that damage? See "A Primer on Writing Articles...", Section 5 for more details.
- Track 2: Write a description of your outcome of interest (i.e., your dependent variable) that discusses a) the concept, and b) how you might measure the concept. For part (a), draw on the existing literature. Is there a consensus about the concept that you will follow? Is there a debate and you will align yourself with one camp? Or will you offer a new way of thinking about the concept in question. For part (b), clearly differentiate the concept and its potential measure. Are you drawing on existing measures or creating a new one? What are the possible scores on the measure? It is categorical, ordinal, or interval? Indicate the units of analysis for your study and how scores on one or more proposed measures vary. This last element can focus on theoretical variation or, if you have cases in mind, go ahead and apply preliminary scores to your cases, even if you do so in a purely speculative way. Include a list of references for the literature you cite. For more pointers, see the Prospectus Writing Guide, Section 2.

Readings

- Greene, Kenneth "Elements of Alternative Social Science Methods for Testing Empirical Hypotheses", 2021.
- Kenneth F. Greene "Money Can't Buy You Love: Partisan Responses to Vote-Buying Offers in Modern Democracy" *American Journal of Political Science*. October 2022. We will use this article for multiple purposes this semester. I'm assigning my own work so that I can show you the reviews and R&R process later on. Using this article for multiple purposes also cuts down on your reading so you can focus on writing. For this week, pay attention to the methods, including the use of large N observational data, a conjoint experiment, and qualitative fieldwork.

Week 4. Framing your contribution and interacting with rival arguments (September 19)

Themes

- What studies should be part of your literature critique?
- What are some possible ways to organize critiques?
- How might one interact with rival claims (i.e., argue against all, build on one, precise one by adding mechanisms or moderators)?
- Should critiques only include logical argumentation or empirical tests as well?

Assignment

- Due Wednesday September 18 by 5pm.
- Track 1 students: Write your literature critique. Recall that a critique groups like arguments in ways that highlight the distinctiveness of your own argument. Push yourself to use critical topic sentences for each grouping of arguments. That approach ensures that your voice leads and assembles the literature for the reader rather than flatly presenting existing studies are forcing the reader to decide what to make up with in relation to your argument. See "A Primer on Writing Articles...", Section 3 for more details.
- Track 2 students: Write two or three exhaustive lists of potential causes. One list should include potential causes of your outcome that you know are represented in the current literature. Include citations in this list and a bibliography at the end of the document. A second list should include potential causes that are associated with your theory or that you might pursue but are not in the current literature. Your two lists can have overlap if your contribution is something other than adding a new argument. You may include a third list if there are potential causes that are not associated with your argument and you suspect they are in the current literature but you aren't yet sure where they appear.

Readings

- Stathis Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996, pp. 1-20.
- Ben Ansell and David Samuels "Inequality and Democratization: An Elite-Competition Approach" New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015: 1-14.
- Kenneth F. Greene "Money Can't Buy You Love: Partisan Responses to Vote-Buying Offers in Modern Democracy" *American Journal of Political Science*. October 2022. For this week, focus on the critique of the existing literature.

Week 5. Visuals for theory and data (September 26)

Themes

- Clear and efficient communication of theory and findings often relies on a crisp visual. Developing visuals can be much more difficult than it may initially seem.
- We will discuss common approaches and best practices for presenting your theoretical argument (flow charts, game trees) and for presenting data (various types of graphs, maps, and figures).

Assignments

- Due Wednesday September 25 by 5pm.
- The assignments are light this week to give extra time for individual-specific work that I may have asked you to complete.
- Track 1 students: Make a visual presentation such as a graph of a central element of your data analysis. You could alternatively revise the causal graph of your theoretical argument Week 2 if your paper does not include empirical analysis.
- Track 2 students: Revise your research question and complete the causal graph assignment from Week 2 for Track 1 students.

Readings

- *MiniTufte*, Excerpts from Edward Tufte, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*. Graphics Press; 2nd edition edition (May 1, 2001). Skim the text, spending a bit more time on sections that seem especially relevant for your work.
<http://cs.unm.edu/~pgk/IVCDs14/minitufte.pdf>
- Kenneth F. Greene “Money Can’t Buy You Love: Partisan Responses to Vote-Buying Offers in Modern Democracy” *American Journal of Political Science*. October 2022. For this week, focus on Figure 1 as a summary of the main predictions derived from my argument compared to the existing arguments, as well as Figures 3 and 4A that show empirical results from two different methods in support of my main hypothesis.
- Sebastián Mazzuca and Gerardo Munck, *A Middle-Quality Institutional Trap Democracy and State Capacity in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020. pp. 30-35. This study uses tables and figures to demonstrate causal processes and score cases using qualitative data.

Week 6. Interpreting findings (October 3)

Themes

- Once the analysis is done and the tables/figures are made, how do we interpret the findings for the reader? It seems obvious but is worth underscoring that findings don’t speak for themselves.
- We will discuss how to interpret findings from quantitative and qualitative data that could appear in a “discussion” section or could occupy a larger portion of a paper or chapter.

Assignments

- Due Wednesday October 2 by 5pm.
- Track 1 students: Write an interpretation of the visual you produced last week that will form part of your findings and discussion sections. Those sections may be one and the same if your work is qualitative. You can send all your results and the full discussion if you have advanced that far. See “A Primer on Writing Articles...”, Section 6 for more details.
- Track 2: Refine your causal graph if needed, write up your argument, and derive your core hypotheses. As you write the argument, pay attention to the logical connections that make it work. Include the main causal claim and a discussion of the mechanisms (i.e., variables that translate the proposed cause into the outcome and typically operate at a lower level of

analysis than the cause). Once you have the logical corpus of the argument, derive the main hypotheses that you would need to test to conclude whether your argument can be rejected or not. Note that the most powerful tests of an argument use hypotheses that *could* falsify it but do not. For more pointers, see the Prospectus Writing Guide, Section 4.

Readings

- You can refer to your favorite journal articles that include empirical analysis and/or to my vote buying paper from prior weeks.
- Pay attention to three main elements. First, authors explain in writing absolutely everything they want the reader to know from the associated visual. The visual should speak for itself as much as possible, but the prose must guide the reader through every element. Second, interpretations are most persuasive when they are led by topic sentences that communicate what the reader should see. Finally, interpretations that involve calculations should use straightforward logic that is laid out entirely in the prose and should use a consistent metric (e.g., standard deviations or percentages or raw scores).
- If your favorite article presents qualitative data, pay attention to the elements presented and assess whether the sum of these parts provides a convincing hypothesis test.

Week 7. Writing introductions (October 10)

Themes

- Introductions can be the most vexing portion to write and is typically written and re-written scores of times. What are the elements of a good introduction?
- How do you give enough detail to entice but not so much that the reader is overwhelmed?
- Although important for your writing in general, special care should be taken to rid introductions of unnecessary jargon.

Assignment

- Due Wednesday October 9 by 5pm.
- Track 1 students: Write or re-write your introduction. See "A Primer on Writing Articles...", Section 1 for more details.
- Track 2: Write your literature critique. See the assignment for Track 1 students in Week 3 and the Prospectus Writing Guide, Section 3.

Readings

- Jennifer Hochschild "Writing Introductions". Stephen Yoder (ed.) *APSA Guide to Publishing*. Washington DC: American Political Science Association, 2008. pp. 93-100.
<https://scholar.harvard.edu/jlhochschild/publications/writing-introductions>
- Review the Kalyvas reading from Week 6.
- Kurt Weyland, *Making Waves: Democratic Contention in Europe and Latin American since the Revolutions of 1848*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 1-17 (or read to p. 34 if you like).
- Jeremy Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 1-24.

Week 8. Writing abstracts and titles (October 17)

Themes

- There is no second chance to make a first impression, as they say. What makes a title sing? Are there “rules” for what goes before and after the colon? Must you use a colon?
- Abstracts are typically limited to 125-200 words. What should you include and in what order?

Assignments

- Due Wednesday October 16 by 5pm.
- Track 1 students: Write a title and a 200-word abstract for your project.
- Track 2 students: Write the research design section of your prospectus. Discuss the method or methods that you will use to test your hypotheses. Will you conduct an experiment, rely on large N observational methods, or small N comparative methods? Will you combine methods? Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your approach or approaches for testing your main hypotheses. Be specific about which hypothesis you will test with each method. Specify your units of analysis and cases. This may be brief if you are using experimental and/or large N methods. If using small N comparative methods, will you use the cases as typical, critical, or deviant? No matter the method, what data will you need? See the Prospectus Writing Guide, Section 5 for more details.

Readings

- Read the titles and, for journal articles, the abstracts for the prior weeks’ assigned readings.
- Read the titles and abstracts of a handful of your favorite journal articles.
- What grabs you? What style and content make you want to keep reading? What elements give you confidence in the author?

Week 9. Writing presentations (October 24)

Themes

- Typical APSA presentations run 10-12 minutes and typical job talks run 35 minutes. Your paper, article, or dissertation is already efficient, so how can you cram what you want to say into such a short period of time?
- We will discuss separating what you “need” to say in verbal and visual presentations from what you would like to say (if you had the time) and how to order the material for maximum efficiency.

Assignments

- Due Wednesday October 23 by 5pm.
- Track 1 students: Write the complete text of an APSA-style presentation for your project and/or put together the PowerPoint slides. If you elect to write one of the two, write the other for next week.

- Track 2 students: Write the feasibility section of your prospectus. Create a checklist of elements that you will need to accomplish to collect the relevant data. Write a timeline for data collection. If you need to learn new methods, techniques, software, or a language budget time for that. If you need to go to the field and need funding, budget time for winning a grant. Will your data collection be acceptable to IRB for human subjects research? See the Prospectus Writing Guide, Section 6.

Readings

- I will give you one of my presentations, including the word-for-word text and slides.

Week 10. Writing and verbalizing peer reviews (October 31)

Themes

- When we are the \$\$\$^! reviewers, whether we are reviewing a paper for publication or a colleague's draft paper, how can we write our criticisms in a sober, convincing, and useful manner?

Assignments

- Due Wednesday October 30 by 5pm.
- Track 1 students: Write a review of the work you received last week. Do not put your name on it. I will forward to the author. Also, complete both the APSA-style presentation and accompanying slides from last week.
- Track 2: Use this week to make changes and catch up on outstanding work.

Readings

- Choose one of the following:
 - Reviews and response letter from Kenneth F. Greene "Money Can't Buy You Love: Partisan Responses to Vote-Buying Offers in Modern Democracy" *American Journal of Political Science*. October 2022.
 - Reviews and response letter from Kenneth F. Greene, Erin Rossiter, Enrique Seira, and Alberto Simpser, "Interacting as Equals: How Contact Can Promote Tolerance Among Opposing Partisans", R&R at *Nature Human Behavior*. Note that this is a short article (circa 3,000 words) that uses purely experimental methods. The response to reviewers is very long.

Week 11. Writing journal R&R letters to the editor (November 7)

Themes

- When we find ourselves in the happy position of having an offer to revise-and-resubmit, how do we write the letter to the editor that details our responses in an efficient, convincing, and sober manner, even if we are fuming at those "\$\$\$^! reviews"?

Assignments

- Due Wednesday November 6 by 5pm.
- Track 1 students: Send a full draft of your draft paper, prospectus, or chapter. I will forward it to another student in the class without divulging who receives it (i.e., blind peer-review).
- Track 2: Write the introduction of your prospectus. See the Prospectus Writing Guide, Section 1 for details on what to include.

Readings

- Responses to reviewers are included in the materials for last week.

Weeks 12-14. Student presentations (November 14, November 21, December 5)

Assignments

- Track 1: In Weeks 12 and 13, 2-3 students will present their projects (oral presentation plus PowerPoint).
- Track 2:
 - Week 12: Write an APSA-style presentation for your project, including PowerPoint slides.
 - Week 13: Revise your presentation and visuals. Catch-up on outstanding writing.
 - Week 14: Presentation to the class.
- Presentations are strictly limited to 12 minutes.
- We will then discuss each project.

Readings

- None

Final Project

**The final version of your written project for this class will be due seven days
before the grade reporting deadline. I will announce as soon as the date is known.**
