

SO369-15 Sociology and Popular Writing (Warwick Journal of Sociology)

21/22

Department

Sociology

Level

Undergraduate Level 3

Module leader

Alexander Smith

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

Multiple

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This module is designed for students who want to think critically about the practical and ethical challenges of applying their sociological training in writing for non-academic audiences, with a focus on creative non-fiction. It will help them gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between writing for academics and for non-specialist audiences. It will invite students to think critically about their own and others' writing practice, initially by challenging the conventions of academic writing. They will then be introduced to a number of literary genres from creative non-fiction (e.g. Blogging, memoir, investigative and long-form journalism, popular science, true crime) to consider questions of what makes good writing, how literature influences sociological writing, and what role narrative and story have to play in the formulation of sociological argument. Assessment will include an essay (with options to answer academic/critical/reflective questions) and a group assignment, which will involve working towards the publication of at least one issue of the Warwick Journal of Sociology, a sociologically-themed literary journal. Guidance on the group work (collating, editing and publishing the Warwick Journal of Sociology) will be provided in class during the first five weeks of the module before students take it over in order to publish on their own as a group.

[Module web page](#)

Module aims

The principal aims of this module are for students to deepen their knowledge and understanding of:

1. The literary influences and narrative roots of academic writing in sociology and the social sciences
2. How to generate original creative work, drawing on social scientific research, with an ability to write in a concise and critical fashion that avoids simple description wherever possible
3. Critically interrogating the conventions of academic writing in sociology and other social science disciplines, as well as a range of literary genres from creative non-fiction
4. Reflecting critically on their own writing practice, with reference to disciplinary and literary debates about what constitutes good writing

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week 1. Why Do Sociologists Write The Way We Do? On the Conventions of Social Science Writing

Week 2. Narrative 101: Storytelling and the Social Sciences

Week 3. Narrative 102: Argument and Creative Non-Fiction

Week 4. Writing in Collaboration: Editing and the Role of Peer Review

Week 5. Sociology in Translation: Writing Across Disciplines, Genres and Languages

Week 6. Reading Week

Week 7. Writing About Real Lives: Ethnography, Memoir and the Autobiographical Novel

Week 8. Writing About Issues: Popular Science, Social Justice and True Crime

Week 9. Writing About Current Events: Blogging, Journalism and the Literary Essay

Week 10. Beyond Academia: Sociology and Popular Writing

Learning outcomes

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

- Demonstrate creative and intellectual experimentation, risk-taking and imagination in composition and language
- Demonstrate editorial skills, including checking, collating, peer reviewing, proofreading and publishing written work online
- Demonstrate how to use social science research to support your writing and abide by relevant ethical issues/rules relevant to the form of their writing
- Demonstrate a critical understanding of the literary influences and the role of narrative in shaping the conventions and norms of academic writing in sociology and the social sciences
- Demonstrate an ability to reflect critically on their own writing practice, whether in sociology and/or a creative non-fiction

Indicative reading list

- Achebe, Chinua. 2012. *There Was A Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. London: Penguin
- Bennett, Karen. 2007. 'Galileo's Revenge: Ways of Construing Knowledge and Translation Strategies in the Era of Globalization.' *Social Semiotics*. 17:2, 171-193
- Berger, Peter. 1963. *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*. London: Pelican
- Billig, Michael. 2013. *Learn to Write Badly: How to Succeed in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Capote, Truman. 2000. *In Cold Blood*. London: Penguin Books
- Carby, Hazel. 2019. *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands*. London: Verso
- Carey, John. 2015. *The Unexpected Professor: An Oxford Life in Books*. London: Faber and Faber
- Carey, John. 2015. *The Faber Book of Reportage*. London: Faber and Faber
- Eribon, Didier. 2018. *Returning to Reims*. London: Allen Lane
- Dagerman, Stig. 2011. *German Autumn*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- Frank, Thomas. 2005. *What's The Matter With Kansas? How Conservatives Won The Heart of America*. New York: Macmillan
- Freeman, Richard. 2021. *Doing Politics*. <https://doingpolitics.space/>
- Gerard, Philip. 2017. *The Art of Creative Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Gladwell, Malcolm. 2002. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make A Big Difference*. London: Little, Brown and Company
- Goffman, Alice. 2014. *On The Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Jones, Owen. 2020. *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*. London: Verso
- Lasley, Tabitha. 2021. *Sea State*. London: 4th Estate
- Lindqvist, Sven. 2012. *Terra Nullius: A Journey Through No One's Land*. London: Granta
- Mills, C. Wright. 2000. *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Oakley, Ann. 2014. *Father and Daughter: Patriarchy, Gender and Social Science*. Bristol: Policy Press
- Orwell, George. 2000. *Essays*. London: Penguin Modern Classics
- Orwell, George. 2021. *The Road to Wigan Pier*. London: Harper Collins
- Prejean, Helen. 1993. *Dead Man Walking*. London: Fount Paperbacks
- Saunders, George. 2021. *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain (In Which Four Russians Give a Master Class on Writing, Reading and Life)*. London: Bloomsbury
- Smarsh, Sarah. 2018. *Heartland: A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth*. London: Scribe
- Steedman, Carolyn. 1987. *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Tale of Two Lives*. New Brunswick, NJ: Routledge University Press
- Steinbeck, John. 2001. *Once There Was A War*. London: Penguin Modern Classics
- Sword, Helen. 2012. *Stylish Academic Writing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Vance, J. D. 2017. *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*. London: William Collins
- Woollett, Lisa. 2020. *Rag and Bone: A family history of what we've thrown away*. London: John Murray

Selected articles from the London Review of Books, The Guardian (long reads), Times Literary Supplement, The New Yorker and The Paris Review.

Research element

For those students who choose the option of writing a creative + reflective piece as part of the assessment, there is an opportunity for them to conduct their own independent research as part of writing the short creative piece.

Interdisciplinary

The module will engage with relevant scholarly and creative works from a wide range of disciplines, including sociology, English literature (especially creative non-fiction, such as memoir, popular science, true crime, etc), cultural studies, history, journalism, politics, philosophy and social anthropology.

International

The module is international in scope as we will be reading texts (Blogposts, journalism, long-form creative non-fiction) from a range of sociocultural contexts from around the world.

Subject specific skills

On completion of this module, students will be able to demonstrate:

1. A systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, particularly focused on the interface between the academic discipline of sociology and literary genres of creative non-fiction, including the acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline
2. An ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within sociology and applied to their own reading of creative non-fiction
3. A conceptual understanding that enables the student to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of the discipline of sociology in terms of its interface with the narrative techniques of creative non-fiction
4. An ability to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in both the discipline of sociology as well as a range of literary genres of creative non-fiction
5. An appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of both sociological knowledge and (creative) writing practice
6. The ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources, from sociology, other cognate disciplines, journalism and the media and long-form creative non-fiction

Students will also be able to:

1. Apply the methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects
2. Critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be

incomplete), to make judgements, and to frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution - or identify a range of solutions - to a problem

3. Communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences.

Transferable skills

Upon completion of this module, students will be able to demonstrate the following qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:

1. The exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
 2. Decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts
 3. The learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature.
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Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	9 sessions of 2 hours (12%)
Private study	52 hours (35%)
Assessment	80 hours (53%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

Each week, students will be expected to do all the required readings and prepare detailed notes for the workshops so that they can participate fully in classroom discussion. Students will be encouraged to read widely beyond the required texts as they develop their own interests in specific topics covered by the module.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Essay	75%	60 hours	Yes (extension)
Students will have a choice of completing their essay in response to an academic, critical or reflective question.			
Warwick Journal of Sociology (Group Assignment)	25%	20 hours	Yes (extension)
Students will be assessed, as a group, on what they have learned during the process of publishing an issue of WJS.			

Assessment group R

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Essay	100%		No
This will be an academic essay based on the readings that we have covered in the module.			

Feedback on assessment

Detailed written feedback will be provided via Tabula while verbal feedback on the development of the online journal will be provided in class.

Availability

Courses

This module is Core optional for:

- Year 3 of ULAA-ML33 Undergraduate Law and Sociology

This module is Optional for:

- Year 3 of USOA-L301 BA in Sociology
- Year 4 of USOA-L306 BA in Sociology (with Intercalated Year)

This module is Option list A for:

- ULAA-ML34 BA in Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
 - Year 3 of ML34 Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
 - Year 4 of ML34 Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
- Year 4 of ULAA-ML33 Undergraduate Law and Sociology

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 3 of UPOA-ML13 Undergraduate Politics and Sociology
- Year 4 of UPOA-ML14 Undergraduate Politics and Sociology (with Intercalated year)