

**SOC b2500**  
**Sociological Writing**  
**(“Making Sociology Speak”)**

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Office 3.66

Consultation Hours:

**Wednesdays: 13.00-14.00 or by  
appointment**

# Some observations on the social issue essays

- Re-writing! Not just minor cosmetic changes but a down and dirty editing will improve your writing. Writing is a process that improves your skills and style.
- Howard Becker says write the text you think is good and then cut 30%
- You are not trying; you are doing (I will try...)

# TQS shorthand for entering a conversation with your readers:

- I am working on the TOPIC of...
- ...because I want to find out how or why... (QUESTION)
- ...so that I can help others understand how or why.... (Significance/SO WHAT)

# Research Goals

- Ask a question worth answering
- Find an answer you can support with good reasons
- Find good data that you can use as evidence to support your reasons
- Draft an argument that makes a good case for your answer
- Revise that draft until your readers will think you met the first four goals.

# Questioning your topic

- Ask how the topic fits into a larger context
- Ask questions about the nature of the thing itself
- Turn positive questions into negative ones
- Ask speculative questions
- Ask “What if” questions
- Ask questions that reflect disagreement with a source
- Ask questions that build on agreement



# Questioning your topic

- Ask questions analogous to those others have asked about similar topics
- Look for questions other researchers pose but don't answer
- Find a professional discussion forum on your topic, then “lurk,” just reading the exchanges to understand the kinds of questions being asked.

# Evaluating your questions:

- You can answer too easily or descriptively (What...? or Does...?)
- Their answers are settled facts you could just look up
- No one could plausibly disprove the answer because it seems self-evident
- Their answers would be merely speculative
- Their answers are dead ends
- You can't find the evidence to support the answer (no facts; a matter of taste)
- You would find so many sources that you cannot look at all of them (too broad)

- Two types of research questions – **practical** (what we should do) and **conceptual** (what should we think?)
- Think of your **argument** as the container for answers to readers' questions.

## **CLAIM + REASONS + EVIDENCE**

- **DON'T FORGET ALTERNATIVE ARGUMENTS & COUNTERFACTUALS!**
- But what about this other view? Give **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & RESPONSE.**



# Planning for an answer:

Propose some working answers (**WRITE** don't just think them)

- *If you can't find an answer, argue for your question.*
- Build a storyboard to plan and guide your work.
- *State your question and your working hypothesis*
- *State your reasons.*
- -Different ways of organization – chronological, cause and effect, relative importance, complexity, length etc.
- *Sketch in the kind of evidence you should look for.*
- Look at the whole project
- Join or organize a writing groups

# NEXT WEEK'S ASSIGNMENTS

- **REQUIRED READING:**
- Somekh & Lewin – Chapter 2 “Working with Literatures” (8 pp.)
- *Becker, Writing for Social Scientists*, Ch. 8 (14 pp.)
- **HOMEWORK DUE:** 3-5 sources for final essays, Due April 22 in the Homework Vault, formatted to ASA Style



**STOP!**  
**GRAMMAR**  
**TIME!**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otCpCn0l4Wo>