Stockholm University

Syllabus
Autumn term 2026

The Craft of Academic Writing (doctoral course, 4 ECTS)

Course director, course tutor, and course examiner:
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Background
This course is about the craft of academic writing. On one level, writing is the most visible of academic tasks: it is the means by which we convey our ideas in theses, books, and articles. On another level, writing is the least visible of academic tasks: we do it behind closed doors, in silent dialogue with ourselves. Even if the outcome of our writing will be shared with others, the act of writing itself remains largely private. Writing is often a source of worry and anxiety – particularly among doctoral candidates – precisely because we are expected to do it, and do it well, with little or no formal training. This course is designed to bring academic writing out from the shadows and into the light of day, not just by talking about writing but also by actually doing it together.

This is not a course about 'how to write a doctoral thesis' or 'how to publish an academic article'; we will not be learning how to structure a chapter or how to frame a theoretical contribution. Instead, we will spend time reflecting on (and producing) sentences and paragraphs in the context of academic research. During the course, we will address the following questions: Why do we write in particular ways? What choices are available to us in the writing process? How can we express ourselves more clearly, more stylishly, more memorably?

Aim
The aim of the course is to stimulate critical reflection on the academic writing process, both practically and ethically, and to provide the skills to edit one's own work effectively.

Course content
The course will engage with issues around academic writing including writing habits and writing styles. The course focuses on writing as a social and organizational practice rather than a universal set of skills. This means that the emphasis is on the practical and ethical choices involved in what and how we write academically, instead of the 'one best way' of producing text for scholarly publication.

Learning outcomes
Upon completion of the course, students should be able to:

1. Appreciate different styles of academic writing;
2. Apply principles of effective writing and editing to their work;
3. Reflect on the practical and ethical dimensions of academic writing.

Teaching and learning activities
The course involves a combination of mini-lectures, class discussions, individual and group exercises, and written assignments. In each session, we will discuss the craft of academic writing and collectively edit a text produced by a course participant. We will also weigh up the pros and cons of using AI-assisted editing tools. The language of instruction and examination is English.

Examination
In preparation for the course, participants must send the course tutor an extract from their recent academic writing (e.g. thesis, conference paper, draft article, or another work-in-progress) two weeks before the start of the course. The text must be a **two-page, 12-point, double-spaced Word document**.

After the course, participants will submit a written assignment (deadline TBC). Participants will edit two pages of their own work and write a critical essay reflecting on how they edited it. They will draw on the course literature to discuss the process of editing, including word choice, sentence length, paragraph structure, voice, and style. Essays must include both the original two-page text (written before the course begins) and the edited text. Essays should be **no more than 2,000 words**, excluding the original and edited text. Students will receive a grade of 'pass' or 'fail'.

Course text
Sword, H. (2012) *Stylish Academic Writing* – please acquire this book prior to the course. All other readings will be provided to participants prior to the course.

Location
Stockholm Business School, Stockholm University, Albano House 2, Albanovägen 18, Stockholm

Schedule
Deadline for registering for the course: Thursday 1 October.

Deadline for submitting your two-page text to the course tutor: Monday 16 November.

Session 1: Monday 30 November (9.00-13.00 CET)

Session 2: Tuesday 1 December (9.00-13.00 CET)

Session 3: Wednesday 2 December (9.00-13.00 CET)

Session 4: Thursday 3 December (9.00-13.00 CET)

Session 5: Friday 6 December (9.00-13.00 CET)

Session overview and reading list

- **Session 1: Writing Habits and Routines**

This session explores the ways we write as academics: what, how, where, when…and why. We will discuss writing habits and reflect on our emotional relationship to writing. The second part introduces the principles of editing that we will use throughout the rest of the course.

Readings
King, S. (2000) 'Toolbox', in *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*.

Clark, R.P. (2006) 'Cut Big, then Small', in *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

- **Session 2: Writing Style and Stylish Writing (Part 1)**

This session examines the nature of academic writing on a sentence-by-sentence level. We will see what stylish writing involves and how we can avoid the most common pitfalls. In the second part, we will collectively edit a text by a course participant.

Readings
Sword, H. (2012) 'Ch. 4: Voice and Echo', in *Stylish Academic Writing*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.

Sword, H. (2012) 'Ch. 5: Smart Sentencing', in *Stylish Academic Writing*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.

- **Session 3: Writing Style and Stylish Writing (Part 2)**

This session continues to examine the nature of academic writing on a sentence-by-sentence level. We will try to understand why academic texts are often so painful to read, and what we can do to make our own writing more powerful and effective. In the second part, we will collectively edit a text by a course participant.

Readings
Billig, M. (2013) 'Learning to Write Badly', in *Learn to Write Badly: How to Succeed in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sword, H. (2012) 'Ch. 10: Jargonitis', in *Stylish Academic Writing*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.

- **Session 4: Writing Style and Stylish Writing (Part 3)**

This session continues to examine the nature of academic writing on a sentence-by-sentence level. We will focus on how to bring your ideas to life on the page: with examples, with elegance, with playfulness, and with passion. In the second part, we will collectively edit a text by a course participant.

Readings
Sword, H. (2012) 'Ch. 9: Show and Tell', in *Stylish Academic Writing*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.

Sword, H. (2012) 'Ch. 14: The Creative Touch', in *Stylish Academic Writing*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.

- **Session 5: Planning to Write**

This session is about planning one's writing time and carrying out this plan. We will consider different ways of managing our writing time and learn how to set and achieve goals whilst remaining happy and productive. In the second part, we will collectively edit a text by a course participant.

Readings
Hayot, E. (2014) 'Eight Strategies for Getting Writing Done', in *The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities*. New York: Columbia University Press.