

## Sound of Science: Writing in the social sciences

Workshop for (PhD) students of social sciences with a focus on social theory and qualitative methods of empirical social research

**Dr. des. Marc Ortmann (Contact: [marc.ortmann@hu-berlin.de](mailto:marc.ortmann@hu-berlin.de))**

The social sciences in general and sociology in particular are language- and text-based sciences: they cannot express their results or, in the case of quantitative-statistical social research, can only express them to a limited extent through formalised abstract code and sign systems, as those are reserved for the natural sciences. Nevertheless, rules of linguistic form also prevail in sociology. However, these remain mostly implicit, and are rarely expressed. The rules are not limited to the jargon of individual theoretical languages: they encompass, for example, the legitimate forms of social scientific questions, theses and hypotheses, the structure of a text (from a student's term paper to a monograph), and sometimes determine the scientific adequacy of even the smallest formulations.

During my teaching career over the last 7 years, I have noticed that students have great problems in following these implicit rules of writing. Even students who excelled during their studies struggled to learn them through a process of trial and error. In the seminars on "scientific work", however, "scientific writing" was often not the subject. My research, interviews and publications on writing in sociology therefore aimed to trace these enunciated and hidden rules and procedures of writing.

In order to counter this circumstance and to provide students with assistance in writing scientific (qualification) papers, regardless of their progress in their studies, I have designed the Sound of Science workshop with my colleague Roman Thurn. I have already successfully held this workshop in the summer semester of 2021 with Roman Thurn at the Institute of Sociology at Ludwigs-Maximilians-Universität in Munich. The feedback from the students was so enthusiastic that I decided to present this concept at other universities as well.

The workshop takes place on two consecutive days. On the first day, we will discuss different aspects of writing in the social sciences. On the following day, we will discuss the previously presented aspects using concrete case studies. For this purpose, participants are also invited to send extracts from their own term papers or dissertations so that together we can find the most appropriate writing approaches. The workshop will alternate between different contents such as presentations, individual or group work.

Timetable *Sound of Science*

**Preliminary Talk (June 12. // 16:00 – 17:00)**

Online meeting to exchange wishes and expectations for the workshop.

**Day I (June 20. // 12:00 – 19:00)**

I. *Effective ways of reading*

- Production of excerpts
- Organisation of excerpts and notes

II. *From an idea to an academic question*

- Development of a concise social science question

III. *Structure of a social science paper*

- Preparation of the research status
- Structure of a social science argument
- Introduction and conclusion: How do I frame my work?

IV. *Audiences of the academic writing*

- Which terms and theorems can I assume to be known?
- How do I define or discuss terms relevant to my question?

V. *Style issues*

- Colloquial language or technical terms?
- Terms and phrases to avoid (from boxed sentences to generalities)

**Day II (June 21. // 10:00 – 16:00)**

VI. *Sources and evidence*

- Which statements require proof?
- When do I quote and how (in/direct quotes, just mentioning the essay/book, ...)?

- May I judge the thing I am writing about?

VII. *Value judgements*

- When and how am I allowed to say whether I agree or disagree with a statement?

VIII. *On the use of theories*

- What theories can I work with?
- What should I do if the theories contradict each other

*Followed by: Joint discussion based on participants' own term papers, master's theses as well as essays, exposés or chapters of the PhD project and other publications.*

**Individual follow-up appointments:**

Following up, there is the option to have individual appointments **online** to discuss essays, writing projects, or writing-related questions.