

BOOKS AND OTHER RESOURCES ON ACADEMIC WRITING

Drafted for the [LIAS PhD pages](#)

There are many books and other resources on academic writing. Below are some examples, with a focus on the humanities and social science, each followed by brief comments.

Much of this material is North-America-focused, as North American higher education has a strong tradition in training students how to write, and the list has only English-language works. Academic writing traditions are not the same throughout the world, but many of the key issues matter regardless of where you do your writing.

If academic writing can feel like a challenge, this material will help you to enjoy it.

A great place to start is [this video clip](#) on academic writing by Florian Schneider. Other online resources include the [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#).

1. On academic writing at large

ECO, UMBERTO. 2015 (1977). *How to Write a Thesis*. Translated from the Italian by Caterina Mongiat Farina and Geoff Farina. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press

- First published in 1977, this remains a classic. Everything has changed, and nothing has changed. The latter point holds for the fundamentals of academic work. Transcends the context from which it emerged, i.e. the massification of the Italian universities in the 1960s and 1970s. Usefully reflects on the nature and history of scholarship. Humanities-oriented but inclusive of social science and other fields.

BECKER, HOWARD. 2007. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. Second edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

- Discusses productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness in writing and publishing, with much attention to institutional contexts. Highlights writing as a process of constant revision. Has a clear preference for a minimalist style but is equally clear about the fact that writing is (also) thinking. Focuses on sociology and social science at large but includes many observations that apply to the humanities as well. Also offers a sociological perspective on academics and their writing.

HAYOT, ERIC. 2014. *The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities*. New York: Columbia University Press

- Inspirational, and as pragmatic as it is philosophical. Considers the nature of writing and the importance of good writing. Makes complexity a positive force, and offers the tools to manage and enjoy it. The “academic style” in the title covers much more than an elegant choice of words, including an excellent discussion of building an argument at every level. Mostly on literary studies and cultural studies and the humanities at large, but includes many observations that apply to social science as well.

BILLIG, MICHAEL. 2013. *Learn to Write Badly: How to Succeed in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

- Critical of writing that is, er... bad. Focuses on the excessive use of jargon, on big words squeezing out small ones and nouns squeezing out verbs, and on the reification of human beings and human processes in social science writing. Reflects on the history of social science, drawing on previous studies of academic writing among other things. Includes many observations that apply to the humanities as well.

BOOTH, WAYNE ET AL. 2016. *The Craft of Research*, fourth edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

- Very widely used. First published in 1995 and now in its fourth edition. Covers the entire process of research, from your first ideas to the publication of your findings. Writing comes in at the end, after discussions of topics such as questions, problems, sources, arguments, and evidence. The importance of empathizing with your reader is a key point throughout.

OTHER BOOKS

- Other books include those in the [Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing](#) series, on topics in the general area of research, writing, and publishing. For example:
 - using library and internet resources; ethnography; translation; citation, etc

2. On writing journal articles

BELCHER, WENDY LAURA. 2009. *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success*. Los Angeles: Sage

- Thorough, hands-on workbook for turning unpublished writing into an academic article and submitting it to a journal. Discusses article design, journal selection, starting to write, making an argument and organizing the article around it, reviewing the literature, discursive conventions, editing, submitting, feedback and revisions, permissions, and more. Usefully distinguishes common practices in the humanities and social science.

3. On style and conventions

SWORD, HELEN. 2012. *Stylish Academic Writing*. Cambridge MA : Harvard University Press

- Lucid and persuasive. Asks why so much academic writing is bad, and shows how it can be good, and why this matters. Engages with matters of style on multiple levels, from single-word usage and sentence composition to the structure of dissertations, articles, and books. Reflects on similarities and differences across the humanities, social science, and natural science. Shows how much room there is for individual choice within the dialectic of convention and originality.

WILLIAMS, JOSEPH AND JOSEPH BIZUP. 2016. *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. Twelfth edition. Boston: Pearson

- A classic that has gone through many revisions and updates. Aimed at a wide audience but also useful for academics. Offers concrete, technical advice, mostly but not exclusively on the sentence level: syntax, sentence structure, word choice, etc.

4. On academic English

BAILEY, STEPHEN. 2015. *The Essentials of Academic Writing for International Students*. London: Routledge

- Comprehensive handbook for non-native speakers of English, but useful to native speakers as well. In three parts: “Process and Skills” (e.g. types and components of academic writing, reading practices, essay planning, organization and structure), “Elements of Writing” (e.g. using various parts of speech, syntax, punctuation, making comparisons), and “Writing Models” (reports and longer essays).

[Academic Phrasebank](#). Maintained by JOHN MORLEY at the University of Manchester.

- Detailed guide that connects issues of structure and composition with concrete examples of word choice. Originally designed for non-native speakers of English, but useful to native speakers as well. Leans toward writing that reports on empirical studies but equally useful for more essayistic writing.

STYLE GUIDES

- The [Chicago Manual of Style](#) and the [MLA Style](#) resources are among the most widely used style guides for conventions (for citation, references, typography, etc) and other discursive conventions in the humanities and (narrative) social science.

5. On revising your dissertation for publication

GERMANO, WILLIAM. 2013. *From Dissertation to Book*. Second edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

- Clear, convincing if somewhat insistent narrative about what a dissertation is (and what it is not) and what a book is—and how to get from the dissertation to the book.

6. On getting published

GERMANO, WILLIAM. 2016. *Getting It Published*. Third edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

- Based on the author’s experience in the publishing world as well as academic practice. Focuses on the trajectory from research to writing to publishing. Includes discussion of book proposals, digital publishing, open access and more.