

SOCIOLOGY 101-8 How Elites Stay on Top

Winter 2025

A digital version of this syllabus (with working links) is available on Canvas

Class Meetings: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 3:30-4:50, Kresge Hall 4-410

Instructor: Doron Shiffer-Sebba (He/ Him), Department of Sociology, 1808 Chicago Ave. Room 103. doron@northwestern.edu

Office hours: Mondays 1:30-3:30pm. [Sign up here.](#)

(<https://calendar.app.google/gTb8WR2KcMiPMwuo7>)

Please use email to ask any questions or schedule an appointment if you cannot make regular office hours. I will do my best to respond within 24 hours M-F 9am-5pm.

Synopsis

Who is “elite”? And what do elites do to stay on top? In an era of extreme economic inequality and populist politics in the United States, many point to elites as a group to rally against, but few explain what it takes to be elite. This writing seminar will explore cutting-edge social science on how to define this group, relying on timely evidence and centuries-old theoretical debates. The course will also examine how individuals go about maintaining their elite status and passing it on to their children. Through consecutive writing exercises, students will not only refine their understanding of contemporary elites in the United States, but also learn the central tenants of academic writing in the social sciences.

Learning Objectives

- Learn to define “elites”
- Be able to explain how elites reproduce their status
- Recognize and craft social science arguments
- Evaluate use of evidence in social science writing
- Improve scholarly writing voice

Schedule Overview

Date	Elites Topic	Writing Topic	Assignment Due
01/07 Week 1	Who is Elite? (I)	Argument	-
01/14 Week 2	Who is Elite? (II)	Evidence	Draft I
01/21 Week 3	Cultural Capital I	Structure & Peer Review	Peer Review I
01/28 Week 4	Cultural Capital II	Revision	Draft II + Conferencing Memo I
02/04 Week 5	Economic Capital I (Jobs)	Audience	Backwards Outlines
02/11 Week 6	Economic Capital II (Wealth)	Voice	Peer Review II
02/18 Week 7	Expertise	Grammar & Citation	Annotated Bibliography
02/25 Week 8	Families	Hegemony in Writing & GenAI	Draft III + Conferencing Memo II
03/04 Week 9	Business + Populism	Overcoming Problems	Final Draft & Final Reflection/ Assessment Due 03/19

Assessment

Please submit assignments through Canvas, where you will also find detailed instructions for each assignment.

1. Ongoing Writing Submissions - 70

The Draft I, Draft II, Draft III, Peer Review I, Peer Review II, Conferencing Memo I, Conferencing Memo II, Backwards Outlines, and Annotated Bibliography will receive full marks if you submit them on time according to assignment instructions and use them to progress on the course's learning objectives. One point will be deducted for every unauthorized day of late submission without proper documentation for delay. This is because late submission may adversely affect your colleagues, who are waiting to read your work.

Assignments are **due by midnight before the class they are listed under**. If you miss more than two assignments you are at risk of not meeting the learning objectives of the course and should talk with your college advisor.

2. Participation and Article Presentation - 15

This course depends on the active participation of every student. Showing up is the most important element. Coming prepared and offering feedback to peers is also crucial. Additionally, you will present a reading to the class in pairs (each pair will present once), answering the following questions: 1) *What is the main argument?* 2) *What are the unstated assumptions the author is making?* 3) *What evidence are they using to make their argument?* 4) *Does the evidence support the argument?* 5) *What do you think about the article?* 6) *What stood out to you about the writing?* I will provide reasonable accommodations to facilitate learning for all. Reach out to me about anything that may impact your participation in this course: documented need for accommodation (reach out to AccessibleNU, they inform instructors), language challenges, absences for religious observances, etc. In case of illness or emergency, inform me via email whenever it is not arduous to do so.

3. Final Draft and Reflection/ Assessment Memo - 15

Most of the ongoing writing assignments will serve as building blocks for the final draft – a 15-20 page “research paper”, to be submitted by 03/19 at noon. The final draft will be graded on the improvement it documents in your writing and understanding of elites throughout the course. To facilitate this task, you will also submit a reflection/ assessment memo, where you reflect on what you have learned throughout the course, the degree to which you have been able to channel this learning into the final draft, and your assessment of how you performed.

Technology in the classroom

This will be a largely technology-free classroom. Please do not use any devices that are internet enabled or contain games. You may open up a device to look something up quickly and then put it away.

Student feedback

The Canvas course contains an anonymous suggestion box for students to make requests, voice concerns, or provide any other feedback. Please use it! It is appropriate for any communication you would prefer to conduct anonymously.

Generative AI

This course will explicitly cover beneficial uses of Generative AI in academic writing. Prior to that discussion, you may use AI to help you with tasks such as:

- Brainstorming/ refining ideas
- Phrasing/ wording

- Literature searches (though you are ultimately responsible for the accuracy and ethical appropriateness of information)
- Organizing writing and thinking
- Checking grammar and style

You may *not* use AI for:

- Generating entire sentences, paragraphs, or essays that are pasted without edits and/ or verification
- Impersonating you in classroom contexts such as an online discussion board
- Composing feedback on colleagues' writing

If you use AI in preparing an assignment, please provide a one-sentence statement on how you used it above the assignment text. If information generated by AI appears in the text, you must cite it according to university policy (see for example the [Chicago Manual of Style](#)).

(The AI statement above has been adapted from Temple University's syllabus statement on AI.)

Other Policies

This course follows the [Northwestern University Syllabus Standards](#) for any policies not explicitly articulated above. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with this information.

Full Schedule

Note: readings and assignments due by midnight before the class they are listed under.

Week #1 01/07 Who is Elite? (I) – Argument

Tuesday 01/07:

(* No reading for class)

Thursday 01/09:

Zugnoni, Michele. "Claim, Evidence, Explanation". Northwestern University Cook Family Writing Program. [Accessed here](#).

Vanderbilt Writing Studio. "How Do I Write a Thesis Statement". [Accessed here](#).

Domhoff, William. "The Class-Domination Theory of Power". *Who Rules America?* website. [Accessed here](#).

Week #2 01/14 Who is Elite? (II) – Evidence

Tuesday 01/14:

The University of Arizona Global Campus. “What is Synthesis?” *The University of Arizona Global Campus Writing Center* website. [Accessed here.](#)

Northwestern University Cook Writing Program. “How to Address Counterarguments”. [Accessed here.](#)

Barton, Ellen. 1993. “Evidentials, Argumentation, and Epistemological Stance”. *College English* 55(7): 745-769. [Accessed here.](#)

Thursday 01/16:

(Draft I Due)

Piketty, Thomas, Emmanuel Saez, and Gabriel Zucman. 2022. “Twenty Years and Counting: Thoughts about Measuring the Upper Tail”. *The Journal of Economic Inequality* 20: 255-264. [Accessed here.](#)

Week #3 01/21 Cultural Capital I – Structure & Peer Review

Tuesday 01/21:

(Peer Review I Due)

Eden, Rick, and Ruth Mitchell. 1986. “Paragraphing for the Reader”. *College Composition and Communication* 37(4): 416-441. Publisher: National Council of Teachers of English. [Accessed here.](#)

North Carolina State University Library. 2014. “Peer Review in 3 Minutes” (video). *libncsu Youtube Channel*. [Accessed here.](#)

Thursday 01/23:

Khan, Shamus. 2011. “The Ease of Privilege” (Chapter 3) in *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul’s School*. Princeton University Press.

Week #4 01/28 Cultural Capital II – Revision

Tuesday 01/28:

Lamont, Anne. 1994. “Shitty First Draft” in *Bird by Bird*. Anchor Books (A Division of Random House, Inc.) [Accessed here.](#)

Sommers, Nancy. 1980. “Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers”. *College Composition and Communication* 31(4): 378-388. Publisher: National Council of Teachers of English. [Accessed here.](#)

Thursday 01/30:

(Draft II + Conferencing Memo I Due)

Rivera, Lauren. 2015. “Beginning the Interview: Finding a Fit” (Chapter 6) and “Continuing the Interview: The Candidate’s Story” (Chapter 7) in *Pedigree: How Elite Students Get Elite Jobs*. Princeton University Press.

Week #5 02/04 Economic Capital I – Audience

Tuesday 02/04:

Melzer, Dan. 2020. “Understanding Discourse Communities” (Chapter 7) in *Writing Spaces* Volume 3. Parlor Press. [Accessed here.](#)

Colomb, Gregory. 1988. “Disciplinary Secrets and the Apprentice Writer”. *Resource Publication Series*, Montclair State College. [Accessed here.](#)

Flower, Linda. 2000. “Writing for an Audience” in *Language Awareness: Readings for College Writers.*. Ed. by Paul Eschholz, Alfred Rosa, and Virginia Clark. 8th ed (139-141). Bedford/St. Martin’s. [Accessed here.](#)

Thursday 02/06:

(Backwards Outlines Due)

Farrell, Justin. 2020. “Compensation Conservation” (Chapter 3) and “Connoisseur Conservation” (Chapter 4) in *Billionaire Wilderness: The Ultra-Wealthy and the Remaking of the American West*. Princeton University Press.

Week #6 02/11 Economic Capital II (Wealth) – Voice

Tuesday 02/11:

Ohmann, Richard. 1979. “Use Definite, Specific, Concrete Language”. *College English* 41(4): 190-397. Publisher: National Council of Teachers of English. [Accessed here.](#)

Harvey, Gordon. 1994. “Presence in the Essay”. *College English* 56(6): 642-654. Publisher: National Council of Teachers of English. [Accessed here.](#)

Vieregge, Quentin. 2020. “Exigency: What Makes My Message Indispensable to My Reader” (Chapter 12) in *Writing Spaces* Volume 3. Parlor Press. [Accessed here.](#)

Thursday 02/13:

(Peer Review II Due)

Hoang, Kimberly. 2022. “Tax Strategies of Global Elites” (Chapter 4) in *Spiderweb Capitalism: : How Global Elites Exploit Frontier Markets*. Princeton University Press.

Week #7 02/18 Expertise – Grammar & Citation

Tuesday 02/18:

Williams, Joseph. 1981. “The Phenomenology of Error”. *College Composition and Communication* 32(2): 152-168. Publisher: National Council of Teachers of English [Accessed here.](#)

Micciche, Laura R. 2004. "Making a Case for Rhetorical Grammar". *College Composition and Communication* 55(4): 716-737. Publisher: National Council of Teachers of English. [Accessed here.](#)

Thursday 02/20:

(Annotated Bibliography Due)

Harrington, Brooke. 2012. "Trusts and Estate Planning: The Emergence of a Profession and Its Contribution to Socioeconomic Inequality". *Sociological Forum* 27(4): 825-846. [Accessed here.](#)

Week #8 02/25 Families – Hegemony in Writing & GenAI

Tuesday 02/25:

Alvarez, Sara, Amy Wan, and Eunjeong Lee. 2021. "Workin' Languages: Who We Are Matters in Our Writing" (Chapter 1) in *Writing Spaces* Volume 4. Parlor Press. [Accessed here.](#)

Sánchez-Martín, Cristina. 2021. "Beyond Language Difference in Writing: Investigating Complex and Equitable Language Practices" (Chapter 16) in *Writing Spaces* Volume 4. Parlor Press. [Accessed here.](#)

Camargo, Crystal. 2024. "Breaking Down the Writing Process with AI". *Northwestern University Information Technology* website. [Accessed here.](#)

Thursday 02/27:

(Draft III + Conferencing Memo II Due)

O'Brien, Shay. 2024. "The Family Web: Multigenerational Class Persistence in Elite Populations". *Socio-Economic Review* 22(1):1-27. [Accessed here.](#)

Week #9 03/04 Business + Populism – Overcoming Problems

Tuesday 03/04:

Flower, Linda & John Hayes. 1977. "Problem-Solving Strategies and the Writing Process". *College English* 39(4): 449-461. Publisher: National Council of Teachers of English. [Accessed here.](#)

Hinton, Corrine. 2010. "So You've Got a Writing Assignment. Now What?" (Chapter 7) in *Writing Spaces* Volume 1. Parlor Press. [Accessed here.](#)

Savini, Catherine. 2011. "Looking for Trouble: Finding Your Way into a Writing Assignment" (Chapter 3) in *Writing Spaces* Volume 2. Parlor Press. [Accessed here.](#)

Thursday 03/06:

Mizruchi, Mark, and Raul Gálan. 2023. "The Trump Phenomenon and Right-wing Extremism: Is Donald Trump a Populist?" in *Business and Populism:*

The Odd Couple?. Edited by Feldmann, Magnus, and Glenn Morgan. Oxford University Press. [Accessed here](#).

(Final Draft and Final Reflection/ Assessment Due 03/19)