

WRITING THE DISSERTATION

Course #PDEV 79407-02
Wednesdays, 2:00-4:00
Graduate Center 8203
[Course website](#)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Writing the Dissertation is a course designed to support you as a dissertation writer. The course has three principal aims: to build a writing community, to demystify what makes a great dissertation happen, and to get you writing at a good, solid pace.

The goal is to do a lot of dissertation writing in class that gets you writing outside of it. We'll talk about everything from writing schedules to chapter drafts. You will also get a chance to critique dissertations in multiple disciplines and review the common practices of academic discourse.

THE SPIRIT OF THE WORKSHOP

The first good practice of any dissertation writer is finding a community of people who understand what it's like to live in the highly stressful, very strange, and sometimes quite beautiful headspace of academic writing. It's vital to connect with other writers when things go wrong, which they inevitably do. Our class is a place where it's perfectly safe to talk about major writing problems, which *all* writers experience, and those problems are usually commonplace. In other words, they are shared problems, and talking about them with other dissertation writers almost always helps. If you ever have questions, or you're experiencing some overwhelming dissertation issues, don't hesitate to contact me. I'm here to help. In fact, we're all here to help! This is a collaborative space, after all, which means we will be working through problems and forming useful writing habits together.

WORKLOAD

Writing a dissertation is enough work for anyone. Adding to the workload of dissertation writers with course readings or additional assignments would be blasphemous and inhumane. So besides working on your own stuff, occasionally reading short sections of someone else's dissertation for workshop days is pretty much it.

Here's a breakdown of the what you'll be doing:

Meaningful "how to" discussions. You'll have the opportunity to get support where you need it and to share what you've learned how to do well.

Achievement board posting. You'll share what you did over the last week, and you'll make a "to do" list of what you want to accomplish over the next week.

Some kind of weekly in-class writing. Every week, you will write during class. (I'll review a new writing strategy to try.) After the writing session is over, you'll discuss the writing you did with others.

Sharing your work for in-depth feedback from me. You'll share a chapter or its equivalent with me for feedback and support in the beginning of the semester. At the end of the term, you'll share another piece of writing or schedule a one-on-one meeting with me to discuss what you've been working on.

Potentially sharing your work for feedback from the group. I've gone back and forth on this, and over the years I've learned that requiring everyone to share a piece of writing for group feedback doesn't work. I respect that writers know what kind of feedback works best for them. So, if you want group feedback, you'll sign up for a workshop slot; if you don't, that's fine, too.

All you need to do is:

- show up every week, ready to write and ready to think and talk about writing
- share your writing with me and maybe with the group, too
- discuss your own writing process and the writing process of others supportively and in earnest

GETTING FEEDBACK ON YOUR WORK

Feedback from me. I'll read and comment on a chapter from everyone in the first three weeks, and then I'll either read another chapter or meet with you close to the end of the term to form a plan for post-semester writing. If you don't have a chapter, then I'll read what you've got—a seminar paper you think could become a chapter, an incomplete draft you're really struggling with, part of a prospectus draft, notes toward a chapter, etc.

Feedback from the group. If you wish to workshop your writing, you will also get feedback from the other students in the course. We'll workshop a few pages of writing from anyone who wants supportive group feedback. For these workshops, you'll submit a smaller section of your writing to everyone. The maximum number of pages you can ask others to read is five. These can be pages you need help revising, a part of your proposal you don't know what to do with, notes that you're trying to think through, anything.