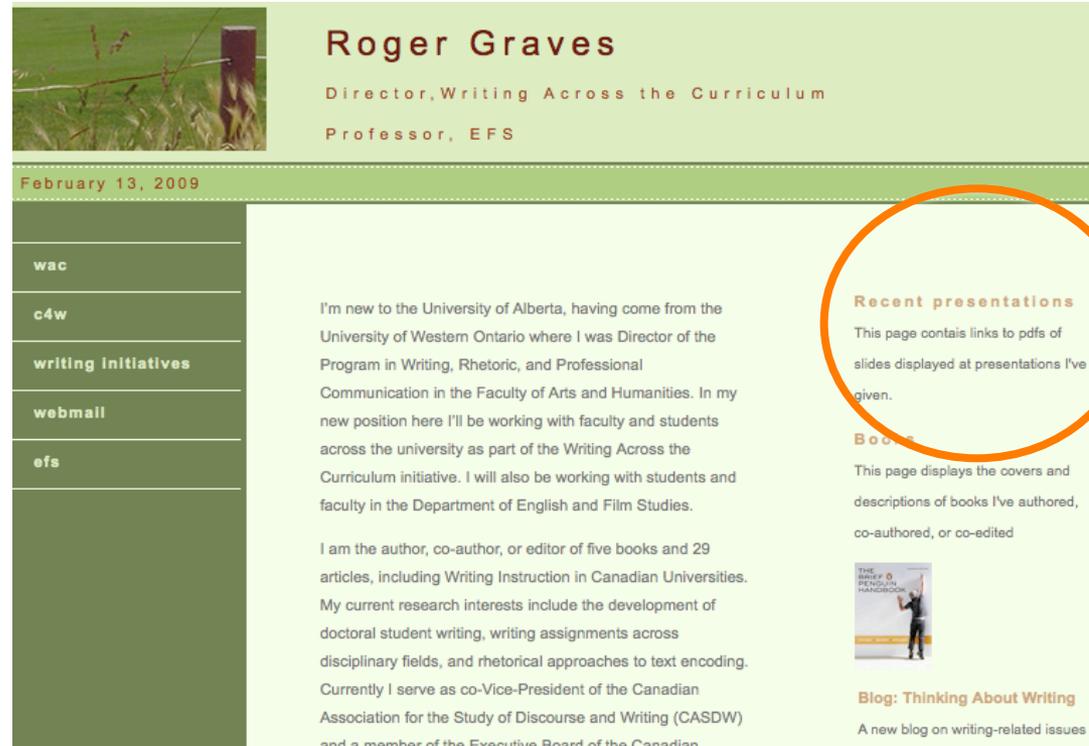


# **Writing the Policy Brief, Letter to Editor, and Research Proposal for Sociology 100**

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Professor Roger Graves  
Director, Writing Across the Curriculum

# Roger Graves



**Roger Graves**  
Director, Writing Across the Curriculum  
Professor, EFS

February 13, 2009

wac  
c4w  
writing initiatives  
webmail  
efs

I'm new to the University of Alberta, having come from the University of Western Ontario where I was Director of the Program in Writing, Rhetoric, and Professional Communication in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. In my new position here I'll be working with faculty and students across the university as part of the Writing Across the Curriculum initiative. I will also be working with students and faculty in the Department of English and Film Studies.

I am the author, co-author, or editor of five books and 29 articles, including Writing Instruction in Canadian Universities. My current research interests include the development of doctoral student writing, writing assignments across disciplinary fields, and rhetorical approaches to text encoding. Currently I serve as co-Vice-President of the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing (CASDW) and a member of the Executive Board of the Canadian

**Recent presentations**  
This page contains links to pdfs of slides displayed at presentations I've given.

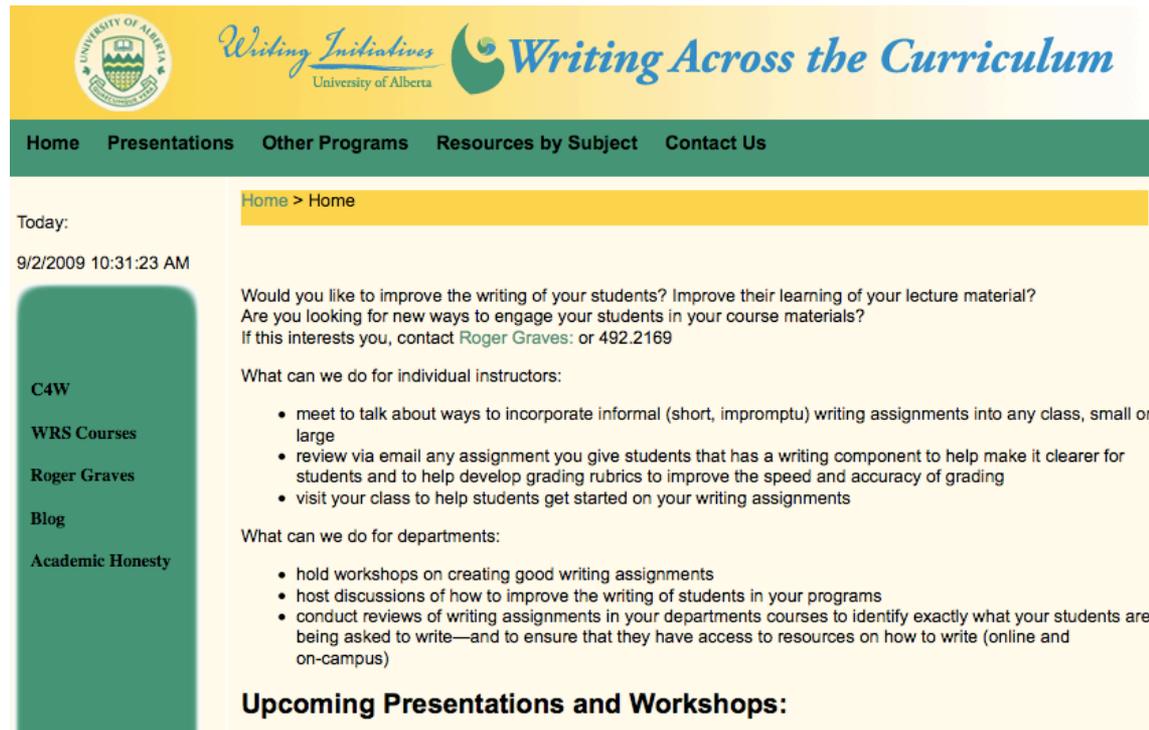
**Books**  
This page displays the covers and descriptions of books I've authored, co-authored, or co-edited



**Blog: Thinking About Writing**  
A new blog on writing-related issues

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~graves1/index.html>

# Writing Across the Curriculum



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Writing Across the Curriculum website at the University of Alberta. The header features the University of Alberta logo, the text "Writing Initiatives University of Alberta", and the main title "Writing Across the Curriculum". A green navigation bar contains links for Home, Presentations, Other Programs, Resources by Subject, and Contact Us. The main content area includes a breadcrumb trail "Home > Home", a timestamp "Today: 9/2/2009 10:31:23 AM", and a sidebar with links for C4W, WRS Courses, Roger Graves, Blog, and Academic Honesty. The main text asks if users want to improve student writing and provides contact information for Roger Graves. It lists services for individual instructors and departments, such as meetings, email reviews, and workshops. The page concludes with a section for "Upcoming Presentations and Workshops".

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Writing Initiatives  
University of Alberta

Writing Across the Curriculum

Home Presentations Other Programs Resources by Subject Contact Us

Home > Home

Today:  
9/2/2009 10:31:23 AM

C4W  
WRS Courses  
Roger Graves  
Blog  
Academic Honesty

Would you like to improve the writing of your students? Improve their learning of your lecture material? Are you looking for new ways to engage your students in your course materials? If this interests you, contact [Roger Graves](#): or 492.2169

What can we do for individual instructors:

- meet to talk about ways to incorporate informal (short, impromptu) writing assignments into any class, small or large
- review via email any assignment you give students that has a writing component to help make it clearer for students and to help develop grading rubrics to improve the speed and accuracy of grading
- visit your class to help students get started on your writing assignments

What can we do for departments:

- hold workshops on creating good writing assignments
- host discussions of how to improve the writing of students in your programs
- conduct reviews of writing assignments in your departments courses to identify exactly what your students are being asked to write—and to ensure that they have access to resources on how to write (online and on-campus)

**Upcoming Presentations and Workshops:**

<http://www.humanities.ualberta.ca/WAC/>

# The writing process

## Getting started

- Explore the assignment
- Make rough notes
- Pick a tentative topic



## Getting feedback

- Make an appointment at a writing centre
- Get feedback on your draft/revise

## Revising

- Work on style and lower order concerns
- Proofread, consult checklist for assignment

# Letter to the editor: rant

The Edmonton Food Bank runs short on food each year.

One of the reasons is because it is not only providing for the homeless or the dirt poor, but also for low-in-come seniors, Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) recipients, the minimum-wage working poor and welfare clients.

With the inflation of the last few years, these people just can't make it.

While the federal Progressive Conservative government prioritized a bunch of new well-paid senators, seniors' benefits are ignored.

Our provincial PCs do the same with people such as Gary Mar, quickly promoting him as our Asian ambassador. Also, to top off the agenda was deciding on an appropriate raise, for new Premier Alison Redford, while AISH recipients must wait until spring.

It's clear to see how our two main levels of government in Canada set their priorities.

It's bad enough to be crippled or in poor health, but the government then adds absolute poverty to it too. It's tough to regain or even keep one's health with a lack of proper nutrition. Even our doctors try to help by prescribing nutritional drinks, but is it enough?

Bob Wilson, Edmonton

# Globe and Mail letter

Not good enough

SNC-Lavalin CEO Pierre Duhaime says their sole project with the military in Libya was a program to develop an engineering corps capable of supporting and building infrastructure for civilian use (SNC-Lavalin – letters, Jan. 17). What he fails to mention is that the project would also create a corps equally capable of supporting military infrastructure.

It is not good enough to say no embargos or regulations were broken. SNC-Lavalin made an ethically suspect choice to work with the military of a country led by a man who had supported terrorism. They made a decision to build a prison in a country where political repression has been rampant and where prisons are run with little or no documentation of the inmate population, including a prisoner's crime and sentence.

The human costs of company activities are at least as important as the financial ones.

Gannon McCauley, Ottawa

144 words

Title = claim

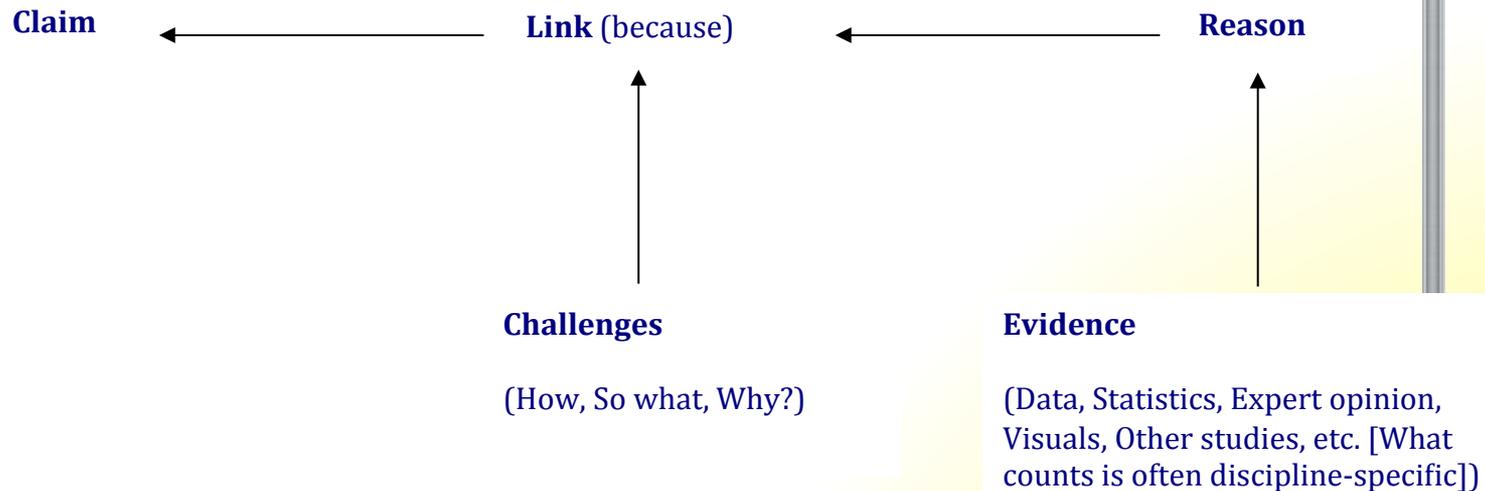
Identifies the issue

States the objection/problem

Elaborates on why this is a problem

States the main claim of the counter-argument

# Informal Argument and Academic Writing



Ex. [this study] will be a unique scholarly contribution as very few studies genuinely combine oral history and the documentary record.

# Letter = argument

- Make a claim
- Argue that the article you are critiquing would have benefited from a sociological perspective
- Show how this sociological perspective would change our perception of the issue described in the article
- Include references (footnotes) to course material

# Style for letters to editor

**Audience** = Grade 10/11 reading level

- Sentences = 20 words or less on average
- Avoid technical language; use common words
- Use primarily simple sentences [subj. + verb +] and avoid compound [sent. And sent.] sentences
- Put the most important information first
- Use explicit transitions

# Policy brief

- Provides background on policy alternatives/  
actions
- Not a statement of opinion
- Is based on evidence/research
- Purpose = persuasive, argumentative
- Argue for a particular direction for policy:

# Policy brief: organization

- **Context and importance of the problem:** what is the issue under discussion?
- **Summarize and interpret the evidence/ data:** what does the evidence tell us??
- **Policy recommendations:** Which way is the best way and why?

# Alberta Senior Citizens' Housing Association

- **Problem:** Provincial home care services are not comprehensive, coordinated, or consistent province-wide and do not sufficiently meet the health care and personal support needs of individuals living in congregate independent and supportive living settings.

# Solutions

- In order for gaps to be filled and residents' needs to be met, several policy and industry solutions have been recommended. These include: the development and implementation of an integrated, community based home care management body within an integrated model of care delivery where home care plays a vital role in continuing care policies; greater involvement of industry stakeholders in discussion about home care; human resource recruitment and retention strategies; and the need for culture change realization.

# Audience

Describe the audience for policy briefs:

What style should you use to write for this audience?

# The Proposal Genre

- Problem
- Solution
- Plan of action
- Introduction
- Definition (what is the problem?)
- Background (how did it become a problem?)
- Literature review (what have others said about the issue?)
- Recommendation (what solution do you propose?)
- Work plan (how will you implement the solution?)

# Audience for proposals

Describe your academic audience for the proposal:

How should you adjust the style of your writing for this audience?

# Strategies for writing

- *Propose a sociological research question (answer the question “why is this question interesting and significant to sociologists?”)*
- *Identify and describe what theoretical perspective and methodology you would use to study it (answer the question “how will you use a particular theory and a particular method to research this question?”)*

# Your Assignment

The *critical steps* include

1. selecting an area of interest or a social problem of interest to you and relating them to sociology,
2. going to the literature to find out what has already been researched in your area of interest,
3. understanding what questions remain about your topic that require further inquiry, and finally
4. constructing the *what?*, *why?*, and *how?* of your potential project

# Caution

- Do not actually perform the research
- Do not write/hand in a research study
- Only write *the proposal* to potentially do such a study

# Possible headings/ organization

- Title
- [body]
- Bibliography

# Formulate a research question

- *WHAT* has already been said about your topic?  
[What does the literature tell you about it and what questions does it leave unanswered?]
- *WHAT* are you interested in researching and
- *WHAT* question are you trying to understand?

# Sample research questions

- “What programs and policies are effective in preventing homelessness in Edmonton?”

## Homeless find ways to survive bone-chilling temperatures

For much of the last 14 years, a small lean-to abutting a south-side warehouse has been home to a small, feisty, red-headed man nicknamed named Smurf.

John Lucas, The Journal



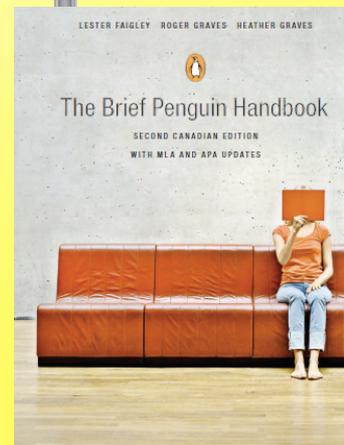
**Smurf stands outside of his makeshift shelter in south Edmonton.**

<http://digital.edmontonjournal.com/epaper/viewer.aspx>

# Working thesis statements

- Specific
- Manageable
- Interesting

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# Working (not final) thesis

Topic	Homelessness in Edmonton
Researchable question	“What programs and policies are effective in preventing homelessness in Edmonton?”
Working thesis	A solution to the complex problem of homelessness demands sophisticated solutions that include <b>three dimensions</b> : affordable housing; enough money to cover basic living expenses; and access to social services (Shelter House 2011).

# Why is this issue important?

An explanation of *WHY* this thesis is of interest to other people.

- Why is this research study important or significant?
- How will it contribute to the literature on your subject, and how does that literature support your question (in other words, what **'gap'** in the literature are you addressing)?
- What potential effects might your project produce in social, academic, economic, political or other areas based on your question and methods?

# Example description

- Your research might help identify flaws in existing areas or create better policies and programs to prevent homelessness.
- It may also inform the government and other funders to allocate more funds to existing programs
- Other ideas?

# Methods

- An outline of *HOW* this research will be ethically conducted, that is, the method that would be used if you were to conduct the research project.
- This will include a strategy for collecting your data and how this data will be analyzed. (ex. Sample characteristics, sample size, recruiting, analyzing data, etc.)
- Briefly refer back to Chapter 2: Sociological Research as a guide

# References

- A minimum of one academic reference from outside of class that you would use if you were to actually be conducting this study.
- Cite using ASA citation guidelines

# Sample method

- Propose a qualitative study with four interviews at an organization in Edmonton offering programs to support those who are homeless
- Other ideas?

# Drafting/Revising

- Get a “trusted reader” to get feedback
- Consider using other students in the course or the writing centre for this
- Ask readers to read for specific purposes: thesis, structure, transitions, development of a particular paragraph or idea

# Don't hand in a first draft

Towards the due date, switch your focus from

**higher-order concerns** (arrangement, arguments, evidence) to

**lower-order concerns:** proofreading, grammar, citation format, grammar/spelling