

Contexts Author Guidelines (updated January 2013)

Contexts makes sociological ideas accessible to non-specialists. Our audience includes professional sociologists, university students, educated “lay” readers, policy professionals, activists, and anyone who’s interested in social analysis. We welcome contributions from social scientists and others who write incisively and accessibly, free of jargon and in an engaging style. Published quarterly, the magazine includes features articles as well as shorter pieces.

Feature articles (3,200 words maximum)

We are mainly interested in two types of pieces, though we would consider all interesting proposals:

a) Articles that deepen or challenge conventional thinking about a subject. Some examples:

--How have Tea Party activists been represented by the media, and what do these images leave out?

--What do members of youth subcultures do when they grow up?

b) Debates, controversies, or trends in the profession, particularly if they are relevant beyond sociology, such as:

--Is Wikipedia a boon to academic research, or is it dumbing us down?

--Is sociology’s heyday over?

Elements of *Contexts* style

Academic journals publish articles in which authors “tell,” or report on their findings. Magazine writing invites authors to “show—to describe, set scenes, and allow interviewees to speak. *Contexts* is a scholarly-journalistic hybrid; we encourage you to submit writing that shows as well as tells. Imagine that a typical reader is your college-educated aunt, or a savvy college junior, and try to make the article compelling and accessible to him or her. Here are some further suggestions:

1. Set the scene. The first few paragraphs should draw the reader in, providing context for the story—by focusing on a particular event or person who is emblematic of the larger story.
2. State your thesis, or “nut” early on in the story, say in the first five paragraphs, without giving it all away.
3. Tell a story. To the best of your ability, populate your prose with living breathing characters who develop over time, and sometimes even come into conflict with another.
4. Make your writing jargon free, active, and flowing. Sentences should be active rather than passive, signposting should be implicit rather than

- explicit. In other words, insure that readers can follow your argument without using academic conventions as “Now I will argue...”
5. Attribute your sources. *Contexts* does not use formal academic citations such as footnotes. Instead, use journalist forms of attribution, such as: “As sociologist Cecilia Ridgeway argued in a 2001 article.”
 6. Conclude your article with a few sentences that drive home your overall point.

Samples of *Contexts* articles are available on this website.

Proposal and Review Process for Unsolicited Articles

Stage One: Send a 2-page proposal that includes a 50-word summary of the main argument, and the first few paragraphs to: editors@contexts.org. The editorial team will review your proposal, typically within 2-3 weeks, to determine if we are interested in pursuing it. If so, we invite you to submit a completed manuscript.

Stage Two: When we receive your full manuscript, we will first review it in-house to determine if it is ready for external review. If we think that it is, it will be reviewed by two to three experts in the field, typically sociologists.

Stage Three: Based on the reviews and our own assessment of the manuscript, we will determine whether to accept or reject the manuscript, or to invite a revision and resubmission. Revise manuscripts will be sent for another round of external reviews contingent on editorial discretion.

Timeline: Our aim is to complete the external review process and issue a decision within three months of the original date of submission of a full manuscript. Accepted manuscripts will be edited and published within one year—usually sooner—depending on the number of manuscripts in progress.

Departments

Proposals for shorter pieces should be sent to the appropriate editor, listed below.

In Brief

A grab-bag of news items and research of note, or sociological takes on items in the news. Submissions should be 200-400 words. Send to Jennifer Hemler: jen@contexts.org.

Trends

Offers insightful analyses of trends in public opinion, culture, politics, and demography. The goal is to expose subtle nuances within broader trends, allowing the reader to think about trends in new ways. Submissions should be approximately 1100- 1200 words with 2-3 charts or graphs. Send to Thomas J. Linneman: trends@contexts.org

In Pictures

Nuanced, visual explorations of sociological themes, framed by a written essay, and detailed captions. Submissions should be approximately 750 words (essay) along with 8-12 images (high-res jpeg files) and their accompanying captions. Send to Katie Hyde: photos@contexts.org.

Mediations

Explorations of dynamics interactions between contemporary and global media, cultures, politics, institutions, and identities. We especially welcome proposals that emphasize the impact of “new media,” along with sociological analyses of “traditional” media. Submissions should be approximately 1200-1400 words. Send to Kari Lerum: culture@contexts.org.

Pedagogies

Critical issues in higher education, and essays on classroom instruction that addresses students as citizens in a global environment. Pedagogy, service learning, community action research, among other topics. Submissions should be approximately 2000- 2200 words. Send to Gary Perry: classroom@contexts.org

Books

We accept books for review and welcome potential reviewers to suggest books—barring any conflicts of interest. Reviews should be opinionated and critical, though not inflammatory. Essays are typically on 2-3 books, and 2000 words maximum. We also publish quarterly features like “Breakthrough Books,” “Forgotten Classics,” “What They’re Reading,” and are happy to hear suggestions of lists you’d like to see. Send to Matt Wray: books@contexts.org.

Unplugged

First person reflections on the profession, as well as on economics, culture, politics and other subjects. Send ideas to Jodi O’Brien: jobrien@contexts.org.