Handbook

Text and Policy Research Group, University College Dublin

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About Us

The [Text and Policy Research Group](#) comprises six researchers from Germany, Portugal, Spain, Taiwan, Tunisia, and the United States. We are based in the School of Politics and International Relations (SPIRe) at University College Dublin (UCD).

All of the projects undertaken by the international research group share a commonality: the application of computational text analysis methods to address substantive research questions and provide policy recommendations. The Text and Policy Research Group consists of PhD researchers and postdoctoral researchers, supervised by Stefan Müller.

Current Members

- Stefan Müller (Group Leader)
- Sarah King (PhD Researcher)
- Jihed Ncib (PhD Researcher)
- Mafalda Zúquete (PhD Researcher)
- Alberto de León (Postdoctoral Researcher)
- Yen-Chieh (David) Liao (Postdoctoral Researcher)

Former Members

- Brian Boyle (Lecturer/Assistant Professor, Newcastle University; formerly Postdoctoral Researcher)

Why Do We Need a Handbook?

Collaboration requires shared standards and expectations. This handbook shares our values, advice, and best practices. We hope this document is a helpful resource throughout your time at the Text and Policy Research Group. If you have any questions or concerns, please start a conversation. We welcome feedback that you may have on this document and how we can continue to improve researcher experience across the academic spectrum. This handbook builds on the advice of Tendler et al. ([2023](#)) and WIN Physics Group ([2023](#)), and we closely follow some of their sections and recommendations.

This handbook does not replace the official information provided by UCD and the School of Politics and International Relations. If the content in this handbook contradicts official university policy, the UCD policy has priority.

More information:

- [Handbooks for SPIRe PhD students](#)
- [UCD Graduate Studies](#)
- [UCD Careers Network for Postdoctoral Researchers](#)

Developing As Researchers

Developing Your Profile

We encourage all group members to dedicate time to developing skills which support their career progression. A key metric upon which researchers are evaluated is their publications. We recognise that not everyone wishes to make their career in academia. Our role is to cultivate your skills and expertise for whatever path you hope to pursue and help you find the next position when the time is right. There are several opportunities to get involved in a broad range of skill-building activities outside your primary research, including teaching, public outreach, and committee activities. Participating in these activities is beneficial not only for the individual but also for our research group as a whole.

When considering the next career move, we are dedicated to supporting individuals, regardless of whether they aim to stay in Dublin, take up a post at another institution, or leave academia. Stefan is happy to help with applications and interview preparation. Inform me beforehand about upcoming applications or interviews, and we will provide advice, including proofreading applications, mock job talks, or interviews.

More information: McCrory Calarco (2020), Bellemare (2022)

Collaborating

Why collaborate? Collaboration in research enables researchers with complementary expertise to work on different aspects of a project, generating results that an individual cannot produce. Individuals with common expertise can also publish more innovative research by exchanging ideas. Collaborations often lead to co-authorships, demonstrating your willingness and effectiveness to work as part of a larger team.

When to collaborate? Although collaboration is almost always beneficial for all involved, it represents a commitment that should only be undertaken after careful consideration and should be discussed with your supervisor. Be clear on how much time you expect to contribute to collaboration. Collaborations can slow progress on your research while over-committing also risks not delivering for collaborators. If you and your supervisor cannot agree on whether to take on a new collaboration, seek advice from SPIRe faculty members and fellow researchers.

Open and Responsible Science

Open Science

Open science practices serve multiple aims for the scientific community. They facilitate reproducible research and accountability for data and findings, help the field move forward more rapidly by

avoiding duplication of effort, and align with increasingly common initiatives from funders and publishers. We are firmly committed to promoting the best open science practice.

Reproducible Research

Keeping your research outputs (code, data, figures, classifiers) in a reproducible state greatly facilitates you and others returning to it later (King 1995). Ensuring your work is reproducible is good scientific practice for documenting your

Discovering Mistakes

Catching past mistakes is an important aspect of good scientific practice and a key part of the research process. Mistakes happen to everyone, and having reproducible research outputs provides you or others a better opportunity to catch and correct inevitable errors.

More information:

- UCD's Research Integrity Training (compulsory course for all PhD researchers and postdoctoral reserachers)
- Open Science Framework
- AJPS Guidelines for Preparing Replication Files

Communication

Slack

Effective communication is a fundamental aspect of our research group, enabling us to collaborate efficiently and share valuable information. To facilitate seamless communication, we have adopted Slack as our preferred method of interaction.[1] Within Slack, we use the Connected_Politics Lab workspace and the dedicated `#text-and-policy-rg` channel. This channel serves as a focused platform for sharing insights, posing questions, and discussing topics pertinent to our work. Additionally, we recommend familiarising yourself with other relevant channels within the workspace to stay informed about activities and events.

When communicating within our research group, it is essential to adhere to general guidelines to ensure respectful and effective interactions. Treat every team member with courtesy and maintain a positive tone in all your interactions. Furthermore, it is important to practice appropriate communication etiquette. Regularly check Slack to stay updated and respond promptly to messages within a reasonable timeframe. Moreover, when discussing sensitive or confidential information, ensure you are using the appropriate channels or private messages to maintain data security and respect privacy.

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[1]See Müller (2023) for an overview of using Slack for collaboration and communication.

Actively participate in discussions related to our research area, sharing your insights, asking questions, and providing constructive feedback. If you come across relevant articles, papers, or resources, consider sharing them in the appropriate channels to facilitate knowledge exchange among team members.

Effective communication is a two-way process, requiring active participation and open-mindedness from all team members. By utilising Slack as our primary communication platform and adhering to these guidelines, we can establish a collaborative and productive environment within our research group. Let us work together to foster effective communication, ensuring that knowledge is shared seamlessly among team members.

Effective Planning and Weekly Check-Ins

Effective planning turns a daunting item into a series of small, clear, manageable tasks. We encourage use a task management app for planning your work (for example, Todoist), but an analogue approach should work just as well. The key is that your task management system makes it easy for you to dump tasks into a list and store them there until you can tick them off. If you did a task but forgot to add it to the list, go ahead and add it and tick it off! You earned it, and it is motivating to follow your progress.

Since supervising and coordinating a research group is difficult, Stefan has subscriptions to the performance management platform 15Five for all group members. You are free to opt out of using 15Five, but our prior experience suggests that 15Five is highly effective for staying on top of our priorities and for communicating progress and difficulties. You will be asked whether you want to join 15Five after becoming a member of the research group.

One-on-One and Team Meetings

Stefan seeks to meet the postdoctoral researchers weekly and PhD researchers every two weeks in person or via Zoom. Meetings will usually be scheduled several weeks in advance, but you can always contact Stefan on Slack if you would like to organise an additional meeting.

Throughout the teaching terms, we organise monthly brown bag presentations. During these meetings, we discuss a document shared by one member of the research group. This document can be a rough idea for a research project, an outline of research design, a pre-analysis plan, or a full-fledged research paper. It is vital that all participants read the text before the meeting. Everyone will be invited to provide comments and suggestions. The document should be shared via email or the `#text-and-policy-rg` Slack channel by Monday of the same week.

Writing and Proofreading

Mutual Support

Publishing high-quality research is one of the core aims of the research group (King 2006). As a team, we support each other in preparing research papers. This involves attending our brown bag discussion lunches, providing suggestions on ongoing work, or proofreading each others' work. Below, we provide useful resources on writing and proofreading.

Writing Paragraphs and Sentences

Paragraphs are the fundamental logical units of a text. It is essential to apply a clear and consistent structure when writing paragraphs. This section leans heavily on Dunleavy (2003), an excellent textbook on writing for research. I strongly recommend reading a blog post (Dunleavy 2014) on the same topic. The key idea here is that a paragraph should follow the Topic-Body-Token-Wrap (TBTW) principle. The TBTW principle states that a paragraph should have a topic sentence, one or more body sentences, one or more token sentences, and a wrap sentence.

The opening *Topic sentence* is a 'signpost' sentence previewing the paragraph's topic to the reader. The sentence does not fully develop the paragraph's argument, but previews the point. A topic sentence should never consist of 'meta language' connecting to earlier points. The linkage between points is taken care of by the wrap sentence, see below.

The *Body sentences* consist of one or more sentences laying out the core of the argument. Here you lay out your reasoning, describe findings, or draw implications. The body sentences should persuade the reader of the claim made in the topic sentence.

Body sentences can be followed by *Token sentences* providing examples, relevant quotations, or supporting facts pertinent to the body sentences. Token sentences are especially important in academic writing, which puts a high premium on backing up claims. At the same time, since token sentences lead the author away from the key point being made in the paragraph, they should be used sparingly.

Lastly, the *Wrap sentence* pulls the argument together, highlighting to the reader what to take away from the paragraph. Any meta-language linking to later parts of the texts should also come in the wrap sentence. To be sure, not every conceivable well-written paragraph fits this scheme.

Dunleavy (2014) lists various common mistakes when writing paragraphs. We should try to avoid these problems.

1. Do *not* start a paragraph with a backward link to the previous paragraph, instead of a fresh topic sentence.
2. Do *not* start a paragraph with another author's name and reference, for instance: "Harding (2007: 593) argues''.
3. Do *not* stop a paragraph abruptly, but add a wrap-up sentence.

4. Do *not* write overly long paragraphs. Once a paragraph exceeds around 250 words, you should partition it.
5. Do *not* write very short paragraphs (below 100 words).

Besides a careful structure of paragraphs, make sure to write concise sentences. If a sentence exceeds 2.5 lines, you should consider splitting it into two sentences. You should avoid run-on sentences, i.e. two sentences that are squashed together. Follow the following principle: "The most important goal for scientific writers is to write clearly'' (Heard 2016: 10).

More information and useful resources: Fiske and Kuriwaki (2021), Nikolov (2023), Holman (2023)

Writing Abstracts

Fabrizio Gilardi (2021) has published an excellent template on how to write an abstract for a research paper:

> "Everyone agrees that this issue is really important. But we do not know much about this specific question, although it matters a great deal, for these reasons. We approach the problem from this perspective. Our research design focuses on these cases and relies on these data, which we analyze using this method. Results show what we have learned about the question. They have these broader implications."

I strongly recommend following this structure.

Visualising Data

Visualising data and results from regression models effectively is extremely important. As a research group, we actively work towards producing visually appealing and informative graphs. We should always be open towards suggestions on changing or improving graphs and share best practices. We recommend reading and following the books by Healy (2019), Wilke (2019) (both books are freely available online) and the detailed paper by Franconeri et al. (2021). We should aim for "inclusive" graphs (Katsnelson 2021), enabling readers with visual impairments to easily detect the important patterns in the data.

Templates for Papers and Presentations

The group maintains a folder containing templates for academic research papers and presentation slides. We recommend using LATEX and Quarto for presentations and papers.

Travel and Conferences

Planning

The primary aims of attending conferences are to present your research, represent the group, and to learn about your field. Use your time wisely: expect to be busy and plan ahead. Discuss your plan with your supervisor. Ask questions and be curious – most people love to discuss their research. Discussions can lead to new insights, collaborations, and often long-term friendships.

Looking out for Team Members

Although rare, people can end up in vulnerable situations during work travel. We expect lab members to look out for each other and strongly recommend establishing a medium for communication with team members attending the meeting. If you see a colleague who appears in an uncomfortable situation, consider whether you can assist them.

Expectations

Whilst travel can be a perk of the job, it can also present challenges. Travel can be a hardship for those with disability or caring responsibilities. Furthermore, people may feel travel to specific places is unsafe or not morally justifiable. You should not feel pressured to travel and should not experience disadvantages if you don't or can't travel. We can discuss your concerns and advise on means to alleviate them.

Logistics

There are a number of details that need to be arranged before travelling. Researchers need to consider what funding sources are available to cover travel and conference costs. We do not expect or encourage group members to pay towards these costs out of pocket. Instead, we always try to get external funding for attending conferences. Research grants may include travel budget, and the Political Studies Association of Ireland provides support for early-career researchers. Note that the School of Politics and International Relations also provides some support for conference attendance. Sufficient time must be given to account for any additional considerations, including visa applications. Moreover, the funded projects often include a budget for conference attendance.

Additional information:

- PSAI Funding Calls for Early-Career Researchers
- SPIRe Handbooks contain information on conference attendance

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

Our research group is deeply committed to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). We prioritise creating an environment where all members feel welcome, respected, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives. We recognise that diverse opinions and viewpoints enrich our research, teaching, and collaboration, leading to greater innovation and understanding. We actively embrace and seek out diverse perspectives, incorporating them into our projects and discussions to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach. In addition, we emphasise the importance of respectful communication, mutual support, and zero tolerance for any form of harassment or discrimination. By prioritising EDI, we foster a culture of inclusivity and collaboration that enhances our collective intelligence and drives meaningful progress in our research group.

More information:

- UCD Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion
- UCD's Bullying & Harassment or Sexual Misconduct Policies

Authors, AI Statement, and Dissemination

The document has been drafted and edited by Stefan Müller. The text has been proofread with the assistance of GPT-4 and Grammarly. The handbook is a living document and will be updated regularly.

Feel free to use parts of the handbook for your own team – we have also incorporated sections from existing documents (e.g., Tendler et al. 2023; WIN Physics Group 2023). We have made every effort to credit existing sources. If you have any concerns about the content or would like to suggest changes, please contact Stefan Müller.

All team members are welcome to contribute to the handbook by editing the `qmd` file. You can add references to the file `bibliography_handbook.bib`.

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