

**University of Calgary  
Department of Communication, Media and Film**

**Communication Studies COMS 363 L01  
Professional and Technical Communication  
Winter 2015**

**January 12 to April 15, 2015**

**(Excluding February 15-22 and April 3, 2015)**

**This section is entirely web-based, with no meeting times or labs**

**Instructor:** Dr. Linda Vennard  
**Office:** SS214  
**Office Phone:** TBA  
**E-Mail:** [vennard@ucalgary.ca](mailto:vennard@ucalgary.ca) (be sure to put 363 in the subject line)  
**Web Page:** D2L available through MyUofC portal  
**Office Hours:** Wednesday 10:00-12:00, or by appointment (except Thursdays)

#### **Important Information**

- This course is delivered entirely online via the D2L (Desire to Learn) system, accessible through MyUofC portal. Please check D2L frequently for course announcements and updates.
- You are responsible for ensuring that your email address in D2L is current and working. In week 1 please email yourself a message through D2L to make sure it does. If you neglect to do this (and to fix any problems with your email) you may miss important messages about the course.
- I highly recommended using your University of Calgary email account for this course.
- For instructions on submitting assignments and viewing marked assignments and quizzes in D2L, visit: <http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/>

#### **Course Description**

This course has a specific emphasis on professional and technical communication in the digital environment. It introduces students to professional and technical communication in a variety of settings and genres, including workplace, academic and online environments. At its most basic level, 'technical communication' is about taking the audience into consideration and translating specialized content into understandable information useful and meaningful for their purposes. In this sense, appropriate professional and technical communication depends on the purpose and audience, and will require different conventions, practices and styles to be effective. Students will learn theoretical and practical dimensions of written, visual and oral communication on a variety of topics, and the processes involved in planning, composing and delivering professional and technical communication for diverse audiences.

The course is based on activities, projects, and "doing. The course is structured around a series of 12 modules, each of which includes specific learning objectives, practice activities and assignments.

### Objectives of the Course

The primary objectives of this course are to develop written, visual and oral skills in communicating effectively in a variety of professional and technical contexts, with specific focus on the digital environment. Students will:

- Learn the conventions and communication strategies of a wide variety of genres, including proposals and reports.
- Develop research skills and competence in locating, constructing and producing information for different audiences and purposes in a variety of formats, including written, visual and oral.
- Demonstrate skill in applying document design strategies and presentations appropriate to a variety of genres.
- Demonstrate skill in the mechanics of writing and grammar, organization and document design.
- Demonstrate effective communication through oral presentations and written documents.

### Required Textbook and Readings:

Graves, H. & Graves, R. (2012). *A Strategic Guide to Technical Communication*. Second Edition. Peterborough: Broadview Press.

Additional online readings, resource material and examples will be posted on or through D2L.

### Internet and electronic communication device information

This is an online course; students need access to the Internet and a computer. All activities will be through D2L, accessible through MyUofC portal. Course Technology Requirements will be posted on D2L, along with contact information for the UofC IT Department.

### Assignments and Evaluation

Evaluation in the course is based 70% on individual assessment and 30% on group project assessment. Student performance and learning in the course will be evaluated through the following components and schedule (see below for further details; note group project assessment components are *italicized*):

Assignment and Evaluation Schedule – All Components			
Assignment	Weight	Date Assigned	Due Date
Individual Project #1: Video Presentation Project	10%	January 19	February 23
<i>Small Group Project #1: Descriptive Process Paper</i>	10%	January 26	February 9
Test #1	10%	February 2	February 23
<i>Small Group Project #2: Proposal</i>	10%	February 23	March 9
Test #2	15%	March 2	March 16
Individual Project #2: Report/White Paper	15%	March 9	March 23
<i>Small Group Project #3: Usability Study</i> (Individual Component: 10%) ( <i>Small Group Component: 10%</i> )	20%	March 23	April 6
Test #3	10%	March 30	April 15

**About the Tests (total 35%):**

Tests are multiple choice and/or short answer and administered through D2L. All tests are open-book, and are to be done individually without collaboration. Tests will remain open until midnight the day after the due date; tests not submitted before this one day grace period ends will not be penalized for lateness. Tests not submitted by the end of the grace period will earn zero.

Tests are 'non-cumulative', meaning they are based on material covered from the previous test to that point (refer to Class Schedule for details). Test #1 (early, February 2) is designed to provide early feedback on your progress and performance to that point.

Test Schedule			
Tests (open-book)	Weight	Date Released	Due Date
Test #1	10%	February 2	February 23
Test #2	15%	March 2	March 16
Test #3	10%	March 30	April 15

**About the Small Group Projects (total: 40%, comprising 30% group work and 10% individual work)**

There are three Small Group Projects with similar formats. For each project students will work collaboratively in small groups of four students, and each group will produce one short (5-7 double spaced page) written group paper on a specific topic, using the appropriate conventions and practices of a variety of genres. The Small Group Projects (described more fully below) are: (1) a *Descriptive Process Paper*; (2) a *Proposal*, and (3) a *Usability Study*, which has both individual and group components. Students are required to work in the collaborative working spaces of D2L in order to provide a record of their processes and contributions in producing the written small group papers.

The Small Group Project Schedule is below, and a brief overview of each project follows:

Small Group Project Schedule			
Small Group Projects	Weight	Date Assigned	Due Date
<i>Small Group Project #1: Descriptive Process Paper</i>	10%	January 26	February 9
<i>Small Group Project #2: Proposal</i>	10%	February 23	March 9
<i>Small Group Project #3: Usability Study</i> (Individual Component: 10%) (Small Group Component: 10%)	20%	March 23	April 6

**(1) Small Group Project #1: Descriptive Process Paper (10%)**

- Working collaboratively in a small group of four, students will produce a 5-7 (double-spaced) page *Descriptive Process Paper* combining visual and textual elements to communicate complex information and processes on a specific topic to be assigned.

- On January 26 small groups will be formed and exact assignment details provided; the project is due on February 9.

(2) *Small Group Project #2: Proposal* (10%)

- Working collaboratively in a small group of four, students will produce a 5-7 (double-spaced) page *Proposal* to write a manual for a technology or process (e.g. smart phone, computer). The Instructor will prepare a preliminary list, and invite students to suggest topics to include.
- The *Proposal* will be in the format prescribed in *Major Project 8.1* on p.191 of the assigned text, and include all sections.
- On February 23 small groups will be formed and exact assignment details provided; the project is due on March 9.

(3) *Small Group Project #3: Usability Study* (20%)

- The Usability Study involves two components: (1) an individual component (10%) and (2) a collaborative small group component (10%).
- Working collaboratively in a small group of four, students will perform a usability study on portions of the Government of Canada website. The Instructor will provide three choices.
- Individual Component (10%): Each student will select one task from the three choices provided to perform individually, and write a short 2-3 page report on their experience of using a specific portion of the Government of Canada website, including recommendations for improvements. The Instructor will provide specific objectives for each of the three choices (e.g. locate a specific government document, search for specific government information, perform a specific task on the Government of Canada website).The individual student reports will collectively provide the raw data for the collaborative small group component; the individual reports will be sorted into data sets for the collaborative small group component. Students must contribute an individual component in order to participate in the collaborative small group component.
- Collaborative Small Group Component (10%): The collaborative small group component involves analyzing and reporting on the raw data generated by the reports in the individual component. Working collaboratively in a small group of four, students will analyze their data set and produce a 5-7 (double-spaced) report.
- The individual and collaborative small group components of the usability test will be based on the material presented in *Chapter 11: Testing and Reporting Document Usability* of the assigned text.
- On March 23 small groups will be formed and exact assignment details provided; the project is due on April 6.

**About the Individual Projects (total 25%)**

There are two individual projects; the schedule for these projects is below, and a brief overview of each project follows:

Individual Project Schedule			
Assignment	Weight	Date Assigned	Due Date
Individual Video Presentation Project	10%	January 19	February 23
Individual Project #2: Report/White Paper	15%	March 9	March 23

(1) Individual Project #1: Video Presentation Project (10%):

- Students will prepare, record and post to D2L a four (4) minute video of themselves delivering a professional presentation on a topic of their choosing appropriate to a business or academic setting.
- Students can choose their own topic or select from a list compiled by the class. Examples will be made available on D2L, and students will be invited to suggest topics. Students without access to video function on their smart phone or laptop should contact the Instructor for an alternative assignment.

(2) Individual Project #2: Report/White Paper (15%)

- Each student will individually produce a 5-7 (double-spaced) page 'White Paper' on a specific topic for a specific audience (e.g. autonomous cars, nonlethal weapons, robotic assisted surgery). The Instructor will prepare a list, and invite students to suggest topics to include.
- The 'White Paper' will be in the format prescribed in *Outline for a Technical White Paper* on p.201 of the assigned text, and include all sections.

**Registrar-scheduled Final Examination:** No

**You do not need to complete all assignments to receive a passing grade in the course.**

**Marking Sections:**

Students will be assigned to a marking section. Please direct all queries about assignments to the instructor ([vennard@ucalgary.ca](mailto:vennard@ucalgary.ca)) rather than to the markers.

**Submission of Assignments:**

All assignments are to be submitted to the designated drop box in D2L; marked assignments will be available for review by all group members on D2L. Only one copy of group assignments should be submitted.

Be sure to include each student's full name (first and last) and ID number on all assignments. Personal information is collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*. For more information, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>

Be sure to use .docx and .pptx (or .rtf) file formats for assignments. Avoid .pdf files as markers cannot add comments to them.

**Note:** It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment.

For courses in which assignments are submitted electronically, it is the student's responsibility to ensure that the correct copy of the assignment is submitted. (Including the version date or version number in your file name may help you avoid submitting the wrong version of your written assignments.)

### **Policy for Late Assignments**

Assignments submitted after the specified due date may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late. In the case of tests, there is a one day grace period, after which a test will earn zero.

### **Assignment Length Requirements**

Assignments more than 25% over the stated maximum length will be subject to a one-level grade penalty (e.g. from B to B-). Concise, clear writing is the goal.

### **Policy on Group Assignment Grades**

Students working in a group will normally receive the same grade on the group assignments. However, the Instructor reserves the right to deduct up to a full letter grade (e.g. from a B to C) for a group member who contributes minimal work toward a group assignment. Students who contribute nothing toward a group assignment will earn an F (zero) on that assignment.

Group assignment submissions must include only the names of members who contributed to the assignment. Including the name of a group member who did not contribute toward the assignment will be considered plagiarism.

### **Students with Disabilities**

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Student Accessibility Services (220-8237, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/>) and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than 14 days after the start of the course.

### **Writing Skills Statement**

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see <http://comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Sources used in research papers must be properly documented. If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

### **Grading System & Grading Scale**

Work in this course will be graded using letter grades for written paper assignments and numerical grades for tests. The final grade will be expressed as a letter grade. The following grade scale percentage equivalents are used in the Department of Communication, Media and Film.

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Department grade scale equivalents	Letter grade % equivalent for calculations
4.00	Outstanding	A+	96 - 100%	98.0%
4.00	Excellent—superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of subject matter.	A	90 - 95.99%	93.0%
3.70		A -	85 - 89.99%	87.5%
3.30		B+	80 - 84.99%	82.5%
3.00	Good—clearly above average performance with knowledge of subject matter generally complete.	B	75 - 79.99%	77.5%
2.70		B-	70 - 74.99%	72.5%
2.30		C+	65 - 69.99%	67.5%
2.00	Satisfactory—basic understanding of the subject matter.	C	60 - 64.99%	62.5%
1.70		C-	55 - 59.99%	57.5%
1.30	Minimal pass—marginal performance; generally insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	D+	53 - 54.99%	54.0%
1.00		D	50 - 52.99%	51.5%
0.00	Fail – unsatisfactory performance or failure to meet course requirements.	F	00 - 49.99%	0%

Where a grade on a particular assignment is expressed as a letter grade, for calculation purposes it will normally be converted to a number using the midpoint of the scale. (That is for example, A- would be converted to 87.5; F will be converted to zero).

### Plagiarism

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. In-text citations must be provided, and readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. Wording taken directly from a source must be enclosed within quotation marks (or, for long quotations, presented in the format prescribed by the documentation style you are using). Paraphrased information must not follow the original wording and sentence structure with only slight word substitutions here and there. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

For information on citation and documentation styles (including APA, Chicago, IEEE, MLA, and others), visit the links provided at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/node/208> . If you have questions about how to document sources, please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3<sup>rd</sup> Floor TFDL, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>).

### Academic Misconduct

For information on academic misconduct and the consequences thereof please see the current University of Calgary Calendar at the following link;  
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

### Research Ethics

Whenever you perform research with human participants (i.e. surveys, interviews, observation) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/research/research-ethics>

### Important information, services, and contacts for students

For information about . . .	Visit or contact . . .
<b>ARTS PROGRAM ADVISING (PIC)</b>	SS 102 403-220-3580 <a href="mailto:picarts@ucalgary.ca">picarts@ucalgary.ca</a>
<b>CAMPUS SECURITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calgary Police Service</li> <li>• Emergency Text Messaging</li> <li>• Emergency Evacuation &amp; Assembly</li> <li>• Safewalk Program</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</a> 403-220-5333 403-266-1234      Emergency: call 911 <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage">http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints">http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints</a> If you feel uncomfortable walking alone at any time, call Campus Security for an escort ( <b>220-5333</b> ). For more information, see <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</a>
<b>DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IT help line</li> </ul>	<a href="http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students">http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students</a> 403-220-5555 or <a href="mailto:itsupport@ucalgary.ca">itsupport@ucalgary.ca</a>
<b>STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing Support Services</li> <li>• Student Services Mobile App</li> </ul>	<a href="http://ucalgary.ca/ssc">http://ucalgary.ca/ssc</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support">http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support</a> <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents">http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents</a>
<b>STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty of Arts Reps</li> <li>• Student Ombudsman</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/governance/elections/home.html">http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/governance/elections/home.html</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds">http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds</a>
<b>SU WELLNESS CENTRE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counselling Services</li> <li>• Health Services</li> </ul>	<b>403-210-9355</b> (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling</a> <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health</a>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE</b></li><li>• <b>Online resources and tips</b></li></ul>	<b>403-266-HELP (4357)</b> <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus</a> If you're concerned about a friend or your own well-being, it is important to seek help early. Call or visit the SU Wellness Centre or the 24-hour crisis line.
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### **Schedule of Readings**

A Class Schedule of weekly readings will be posted on D2L.