

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

**Communications Studies COMS 363 L05**  
**Professional and Technical Communication**

**Winter 2016**

Saturday January 16, 2016 – Saturday April 9, 2016

Saturdays 13:00 – 16:30pm

**Instructor:** Sharon Ramraj-Thompson  
**Office:** SS307  
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**Web Page:** D2L available through MyUofC portal  
**Office Hours:** Saturday 16:30 – 17:30

### **Course Description**

This course is an introduction to professional and technical communication. Students will learn the rhetorical dimensions of the workplace settings as well as the process of planning, researching, composing, and delivering professional and technical communication for various audiences.

### **Additional Information**

The major project in this course will be a usability study of a website. All of the classes will be held in a computer lab and most classes will include a lab component, including time for in-class work and research.

### **Objectives of the Course**

The course will help you develop

- a rhetorical approach to crafting documents--one in which you critically consider your purpose, the needs of your audience(s), and relevant features of the context;
- a familiarity with the conventions and composing strategies for a range of written genres, including memos, technical descriptions or fact sheets, proposals and reports;
- document design strategies to ensure that your documents and websites look professional, promote easy retrieval of information, and use visuals to communicate information effectively;
- writing strategies to keep your writing focused, coherent, and readable;

- skill in editing to eliminate common errors in sentence structure, grammar, word use, spelling, and punctuation;
- familiarity with tools for online research and competence in the use of a standard style of documentation (e.g., APA, MLA);
- competence in developing and delivering presentations.

### **Textbooks and Readings**

Graves, H., & Graves. R. (2012). *A Strategic Guide to Technical Communication, 2<sup>ND</sup> ed.* Peterborough ON: Broadview Press.

Additional readings and resources will be available online or on D2L

See the detailed schedule of readings provided at the end of this course outline.

### **Internet and electronic communication device information**

Students are requested to use electronic devices in class (laptops, Ipads, cell phones) only for course-related communications.

### **Assignments and Evaluation**

Page ranges are for single-spaced text.

- **20% quiz** on Visual Critique, in class, February 6, 2016
- **15% Project proposal** for website usability study (3-4 pages) (group) due at the beginning of class, March 5, 2016. Hard copy required. One copy per group
- **15% - Take home Cover letter Assignment** (individual). (1 page) due in class at the beginning of class, March 19, 2016
- **20% Group presentation** (10% of powerpoint, 10% individual grade) on usability study, in class, March 26, 2016
- **30% Final report for website usability study** (17-20 pages) (group) due April 9, 2016

**Registrar-scheduled Final Examination:** No

All assignments and exams must be completed or a course grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

**Submission of Assignments:** Please hand in your essays directly to your tutor or instructor if possible. If it is not possible to do so, a daytime drop box is available in

SS320; a date stamp is provided for your use. A night drop box is also available for after-hours submission. Assignments will be removed the following morning, stamped with the previous day's date, and placed in the instructor's mailbox.

Please include your name and ID number on all assignments, and be prepared to provide picture ID to pick up assignments or look at final exams in SS 320 after classes have ended. 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>

**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 deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late

### **Student Accommodations:**

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services; SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For additional information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit [www.ucalgary.ca/access/](http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/).

Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor. The full policy on Student Accommodations is available at [http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy\\_0.pdf](http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy_0.pdf) .

Please note:

1. Students seeking accommodations for transient illnesses (e.g., the flu) should contact their instructors directly. Whenever possible, students should advise their instructors in advance if they will be missing quizzes, presentations, in-class assignments, or group meetings.
2. When accommodations are granted, they may take forms other than make-up tests or assignments. For example, the weight of a missed grade may be added to another assignment or test.
3. For information on Deferrals of Final Exams and Term Work, see sections G.6 and G.7 of the *University Calendar* at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html> and <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html>

### **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 & Grade Scale of the Department of Communication, Media and Film

Final grades are reported as letter grades. Assignments, exams, and other work in this course will be graded using letter grades.

The following grade scale percentage equivalents are used in the Department. If letter grades are used for an assignment or other course component, the percentage equivalent in the final column will be used for calculating the final grade:

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%

### 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 <https://ucalgary.ca/ssc/resources/writing-support/436> . 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 its consequences, please see the University of Calgary Calendar at <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/resources/ethics>

If this course requires (or allows) students to conduct (or act as participants in) primary research involving surveys, interviews, or observations, state that here, describe the nature of students’ participation, and indicate whether you have received course-based ethics approval from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee or if you expect students to apply for ethics approval themselves. **NOTE: If you have not received course-based ethics approval and do not expect your students to apply on their own for research ethics clearance, then your course outline should not include any assignments requiring surveys, interviews, or other research with people.** (One approved exception is for usability studies in COMS 363 in which students may conduct anonymous online usability surveys to get their classmates’ opinions on the usability of a website.

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

For information about . . .	Visit or contact . . .
<b>ARTS PROGRAM ADVISING (ASC)</b>	SS 102 403-220-3580 <a href="mailto:artsads@ucalgary.ca">artsads@ucalgary.ca</a>
<b>CAMPUS SECURITY</b>	<a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</a> 403-220-5333
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calgary Police Service</li> <li>• Emergency Text Messaging</li> </ul>	403-266-1234 <b>Emergency: call 911</b> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage">http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage</a>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergency Evacuation &amp; Assembly</li> <li>• <b>Safewalk Program</b></li> </ul>	<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 (220-5333). For more information, see <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</a>
<p><b>DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support</b></p> <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>
<p><b>STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE</b></p> <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>
<p><b>STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty of Arts Reps</li> <li>• Student Ombudsman</li> </ul>	<a href="https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/">https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds">http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds</a>
<p><b>SU WELLNESS CENTRE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counselling Services</li> <li>• Health Services</li> <li>• Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE</li> <li>• Online resources and tips</li> </ul>	<p><b>403-210-9355</b> (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm</p> <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> 403-266-HELP (4357) <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.

**Schedule of Lectures and Readings** (on the next page)

## Detailed schedule of Lectures and Readings (all chapters are from Graves and Graves, 2012)

Any changes to this schedule will be posted on D2L

### Saturday, January 16, 2016

**Focus:** Overview of course; basic concepts--audience, purpose & genre

**Read for class**

- Coms 363 course outline
- Ch. 1 Thinking about audience, purpose, & genre

### Saturday, January 23, 2016

**Focus:** workplace genres (email, letters, memo-reports)

**Read for class**

- Ch 1 – Cover letters
- Ch. 7 Writing emails and letters for the workplace

**Lab:** Formation of website usability study groups; choice of website to study

### Saturday, January 30, 2016

**Focus:** Visual critiques

**Read for class**

- **Visual critique assignment guidelines** (to be posted on D2L)
- Ch. 6 Communicating through visuals
- Few, S. (2007). Save the pies for dessert. Retrieved from <http://www.perceptualedge.com/articles/08-21-07.pdf>
- North Carolina State University (NCSU). (2004). LabWrite Resources, at <http://labwrite.ncsu.edu/res/res-homepage.htm>
- Malamed, C. (2010). Guidelines for designing tables. Retrieved August 5, 2011, from <http://understandinggraphics.com/design/data-table-design/>
- Attrill, R. (2010, December). Designing effective data tables. Retrieved December 14, 2012, from <http://www.behance.net/gallery/Designing-Effective-Data-Tables/885004> [This piece contains examples to illustrate points made by Malamed (2010)]

Visual Critique Assignment handed out / posted on D2L.

## Saturday, February 6, 2016

**Visual critique quiz on text and articles listed above (20%) at the beginning of class**

**Focus:** Researching technical subjects; usability testing

### Read for class

- Proposal assignment guidelines (to be posted on D2L)
- Ch. 3 Researching technical subjects
- Ch. 11 Testing and reporting document usability
- Jerz, D. (2010). Usability testing: 8 quick tips for designing tests. Retrieved from <http://jerz.setonhill.edu/design/usability/tips.htm>

**Lab:** Work on group project: start drafting proposal introduction and in-person usability test description or survey

## Saturday, February 13, 2016

**Focus:** proposal writing; research ethics

### Read for class

- Ch. 8 Writing winning proposals
- Ch. 5 Designing documents and page layout

**Lab:** work on proposals, usability evaluation criteria; write research methods section; draft usability test instructions or survey

## Saturday, February 20, 2016 Reading week (no class)

## Saturday, February 27, 2016

**Cover letter take-home assignment given out**

**Focus:** Strategies for effective writing and editing, APA citation

### Read for class

- Ch. 4 Writing technical prose
- Ch. 2 Leading and Misleading the reader
- Handout on Parallelism (to be posted on D2L)
- APA Materials (to be posted on D2L)
- Gullikson, S. et al. (1999). The impact of information architecture on academic web site usability. *The Electronic Library* 17(5), 293-304. Retrieved from <https://www.unc.edu/~acrystal/110-117/gullikson.pdf>



- Lynch, P. J. & Horton, S. (2009). *Web style guide, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.* Retrieved from <http://webstyleguide.com/wsg3/index.html>
- Morke, J. & Nielsen, J. (1997). Concise, scannable, and objective: How to write for the web. Retrieved from <http://www.useit.com/papers/webwriting/writing.html>
- U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. (n.d). [Sections on usability basics, methods, & guidelines] Retrieved December 14, 2012, from <http://www.usability.gov>
- Other grammar and editing handouts will be posted on D2L

### Saturday, March 5, 2016

**Project proposal for website usability study (group) (15%) due at the beginning of class, hard copy required.**

**Focus:** in-class usability testing

**LAB:** in-class usability testing and surveys. Students will be assigned to complete usability surveys or tests designed by other groups. By the end of the class, all usability testing research should be complete. If time allows, groups may begin analyzing their findings and planning the structure of their final report

### Saturday, March 12, 2016

**Focus:** Oral Presentations

**Read for class**

- Ch. 13 Presenting technical information orally

**LAB:** Work on PowerPoints for group presentations

### Saturday, March 19, 2016

**Take-home Cover letter assignment due today, start of class, (15%), hard copy required**

**Read for class:**

- Final project assignment description on D2L (note: this is a very long document, that will be reviewed thoroughly in class this day)

**LAB:** Work and practice group presentations and continue work on final project

### Saturday, March 26, 2016

Group presentations on usability study projects (10% group grade for powerpoint itself, 10% individual grade on presenting)

**Saturday, April 2, 2016**

**Focus:** Work on Final Report – due Saturday April 9, 2015

**Saturday, April 9, 2016**

Course wrap up

Final project due today (30%) at the beginning of class