Faculty of Arts, University of Calgary
Department of Communication and Culture

COMS 363: Professional and Technical Communication (L01)
Fall 2011: Tues., Sept. 13 – Thurs., Dec. 8, 2011

<mark>An on-line course on the Blackboard system</mark>

Instructor:	Jo-Anne Andre, M.A.	**Office Location:** SS 350
Office Phone:	(403) 220-7429	**Email:** andre@ucalgary.ca
Blackboard Log-in:	https://blackboard.ucalgary.ca/webapps/login/	
Office Hours:	Fridays 10:00 am to 12:00 noon or by appointment	

Additional information:

- There will be no virtual or in person class meetings, but the instructor is willing to review drafts during office hours or by appointment. If you have questions about the course or any assignments, please email the instructor. Be sure to put 363 in the subject line.

- Please check the Blackboard site weekly for announcements and course materials.

Course description & objectives:

An introduction to professional and technical communication. Students will learn the rhetorical dimensions of workplace settings as well as the process of planning, researching, composing, and delivering professional and technical communication for various audiences. The major project in this course will involve a usability study of a website.

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 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, and skill in editing to eliminate common errors in sentence structure, grammar, word use, spelling, and punctuation

- competence in the use of a standard style of documentation (e.g., APA)

- familiarity with a range of resources for professional writers, including tools for online research and collaborative writing

- competence in preparing PowerPoint presentations.

The course will also give you the opportunity to develop your collaborative writing skills in an online setting. However, students have the option of completing the major project set individually.

Required textbook:

Tebeaux, E., & Dragga, S. (2010). *The essentials of technical communication.* New York: Oxford University Press. (Used copies may be available.)

Additional course readings are listed below, and a detailed weekly syllabus of readings and tasks is included at the end of this document.

Additional required readings on web page design & usability testing:

Gullikson, S., Blades, R., Bragdon, M., McKibbon, S., Sparling, M., & Toms, E. G. (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

> *This journal article reports on an in-person usability study of Dalhousie University's web site. The appendix includes a copy of the usability test questions.*

Jerz, D. (2010). *Usability testing: 8 quick tips for designing tests*. Retrieved June 14, 2010, from http://jerz.setonhill.edu/design/usability/tips.htm

> *This short guide includes sample usability test questions and suggestions for wording.*

Lynch, P.J., & Horton, S. (2009). *Web style guide, 3rd edition*. Retrieved from http://webstyleguide.com/wsg3/index.html

> *This multi-chapter online guide provides guidelines for designing effective web sites. Chapters address information architecture, interface design, typography, and other topics, and the work includes many full-colour illustrations.*

Morkes, J., & Nielsen, J. (1997). Concise, scannable, and objective: How to write for the web. Retrieved June 16, 2010, from http://www.useit.com/papers/webwriting/writing.html

> *This article reports on three studies focusing on how writing style and page layout affect the usability of web pages. For a short version of the findings, see Nielsen's (1997) article "How users read on the web," available at http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9710a.html*

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.a) Usability.gov Retrieved June 16, 2010, from http://www.usability.gov

> *This resource defines usability, describes usability testing methods, and provides guidelines for designing usable websites. The Basics section explains that "usability" measures five factors: "Ease of learning…, Efficiency of use…, Memorability…, Error frequency and severity…, [and] User satisfaction" ("What does usability measure," para 4.) The Methods section provides a helpful overview of various kinds of usability tests, including in-person usability testing, individual interviews, and heuristic evaluation. A separate link to the Guidelines section is provided below.*

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.b). Guidelines. Usability.gov Retrieved June 16, 2010, from http://www.usability.gov/guidelines/index.html

> *This comprehensive set of guidelines addresses various aspects of web design, including the home page, scrolling, the use of links, lists, and graphics, and site organization. The final chapter includes guidelines for usability testing.*

Recommended readings:

These readings may be useful for completing various assignments, particularly the recommendations memo and the critique of two visuals.

Atkins, A. (2010). Digital strategies for group work. In *Writing spaces: Readings on writing, vol. 1* (C. Lowe & P. Zemliansky, eds.). Retrieved from http://writingspaces.org/sites/default/files/atkins--collaborating-online.pdf

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

Assignments & due dates:

All the following (except the quizzes) must be completed in order to pass the course:

4%	Quiz 1 (on Ch. 1, 2, 3, & 7)	Tues., Sept. 27, 2011*
4%	Quiz 2 (on Ch. 4, 5, & 6)	Thurs., Oct. 6
20%	Recommendation memo OR blog article	Tues., Oct. 11
4%	Quiz 3 (on Ch. 8 & 9)	Tues., Oct. 18
10%	Project proposal (with group contract)	Thurs., Oct. 27 (group)**
4%	Quiz 4 (on Ch. 10, 11, & PPT on PowerPoints)	Tues., Nov. 8
10%	Critique of two visuals	Tues., Nov. 15
10%	PowerPoint presentation (& notes)	Tues., Nov. 29 (group)
	Submit draft of final report for peer review	Thurs., Dec. 1 (group)***
4%	Email memo to peers: review of report draft	Tues., Dec. 6 (group)
30%	Final report (with letter of transmittal)	Thurs., Dec. 8 (group)

There will be no registrar-scheduled final exam in this course. For assignment information, see the ASSIGNMENTS area in Blackboard. See also the Course Information section below.

* Quizzes: Quizzes are open-book and are to be done individually without collaboration. Quizzes will remain open for 7 days past the due date; once quizzes close, they will not be reopened. There are no late penalties on quizzes, but quizzes not submitted within the 7-day grace period will earn a zero. Note: Students may substitute a discussion board posting for any one of the four quizzes. See the Assignments area of Blackboard for more information.

**Group assignments: Students may opt to work individually rather than in groups for this set of four assignments, but the workload will be essentially the same.

*** *Peer review:* If your group does not submit a draft for peer review, you will not receive credit for the peer review that you complete for another group.

Marking groups:

Students will be assigned to one of the following marking groups. Please direct all queries about assignments to the instructor (andre@ucalgary.ca) rather than to the markers.

Group	Marker	Email	File format preferences
1	Angie Chiang	achiang@ucalgary.ca	.doc & .ppt preferred
2	Denise Guichon	deniseguichon@gmail.com	
3, 4	Andrea Hanslip	andreamarker@mac.com	.docx & .pptx are fine
5	Sabrina Krivan	sabrinakrivan@hotmail.com	.docx & .pptx are fine
6	Jeremy Leipert	jkleiper@ucalgary.ca	.docx & .pptx are fine, but please use .pdf for the final report
7	Sarah Lockwood	slockwoo@ucalgary.ca	.docx & .pptx are fine
8	Stephanie Rakowski-Reid	reidsl@telusplanet.net	.docx & .pptx are fine

Course Information and Policies (A to Z)

Assignment submission, return, & important technical information

- Please submit all assignments (including the quizzes) via the links provided in the ASSIGNMENTS area of Blackboard. (Submitted assignments will show up as a ! symbol in your marker's grade book.) Do not email your assignments or use the drop box.

- <mark>Note that browser compatibility issues may interfere with assignment uploading.</mark> Firefox 4 or 5 and Internet Explorer 9 are not supported browsers. Supported browsers for Blackboard 8 are listed here: http://kb.blackboard.com/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=57442326
  To downgrade Firefox to 3.6, get the file here: http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/all-older.html

- Keep a copy of all assignments submitted. Consider using Box.net to store assignment copies so that they can be accessed from anywhere.

- Normally, assignments will be returned within two weeks. Retrieve your marked assignment via the assignment submission portal.

Assignment file formats & file names

- Please use .docx and .pptx (Microsoft 2007) files unless your marker prefers a different file format; see the Marking Groups section above. A good alternative is .rtf file format.

- Avoid .pdf files as markers cannot add comments to them; however, you may submit a .pdf copy of your final report along with a .docx or .doc version, so your marker can check the .pdf in case formatting appears to be lost in translation using other formats.

- To minimize the chance of a file mix-up, please use the following format for naming your files: **363 proposal Smith, Ngo, & Carter.doc**

Assignment length requirements

- Assignments may go up to 25% over the required length; beyond that, a one-level grade penalty will normally apply. Note that conciseness is generally a virtue in workplace writing.

Blackboard information & technical support

- For information on Blackboard, look under the HELP button on the BB course menu for information and advice on information technology (IT) issues.

- For technical support, call the IT support desk (403-220-5555) or e-mail itsupport@ucalgary.ca

Extensions & late policy

- Assignments are due at **7:00 pm** MST on the due date, but <mark>you will be allowed a 48-hour grace period with no late penalty on all assignments due before December 1.</mark> If you require an extension, please e-mail the instructor, explaining your reasons. For each day late beyond the grace period (including Saturdays and Sundays), one letter grade level (e.g., B to B-) will be deducted.

Grade appeals & assignment revisions

- Students (or groups) who earn a D or D+ on the recommendation memo, blog article, proposal, or critique assignments may revise and resubmit the assignment to the instructor (by email) within 15 days. Successful revisions may earn a grade increase to the C- level.

- Within 15 days of the return of an assignment, students may request a reassessment of an assignment. Such requests should be directed to the instructor (by email), they should be professional in tone, and they should clearly explain the grounds for the reassessment. Note that grades may be increased or lowered on appeal. As explained in the University Calendar (p. 46), reassessed grades may be further appealed at the department level within 15 days.

Grade scale

▪ The following grading system is used in the Dept. of Communication and Culture:

	Grading Scale	**Midpoint** (used for calculations)	
A+	96 - 100.00 %	98.0%	**Note:** Except for F grades, the midpoints of the percentage ranges will be used for calculating final grades.
A	90 – 95.99	93.0	
A -	85 – 89.99	87.5	
B+	80 – 84.99	82.5	
B	75 – 79.99	77.5	Grades for quizzes and discussion board postings will be entered as scores out of 10.
B-	70 - 74.99	72.5	
C+	65 - 69.99	67.5	
C	60 - 64.99	62.5	
C-	55 - 59.99	57.5	F grades will be converted to zero.
D+	53 - 54.99	54.0	
D	50 - 52.99	51.5	
F	0 - 49.99	0.01	

Group project

▪ The main set of assignments—the proposal, PowerPoint, and final report, with peer review—may be done in a group or individually. In week 2, the instructor will randomly put students into groups of five. If you wish to leave your assigned group to work individually, please email your group members and the instructor by Sept. 30. (Students who opt out of their assigned groups may be allowed to join another group or to form a new group only if circumstances warrant.)

▪ All group members will receive the same grade on group assignments; groups should ensure that the workload is distributed fairly. Group assignments should include only the names of members who contributed to the assignment in some way.

Plagiarism & cheating:

▪ It is fine to discuss your ideas with others and to have someone review your written work to point out weaknesses and typos. These practices are common in the workplace and do not constitute plagiarism as long as <u>you </u>do the corrections and the rewriting. All of the following, however, constitute plagiarism:

   o using wording, ideas, information, or graphics from published material or from the internet without citing the source—**even when you put the information into your own words.**

   o taking wording from published or online material without using quotation marks (or formatting long quoted passages according to documentation conventions).

   o passing off the work of others as your own OR submitting work that you have done previously or that you are now doing for another course) as if it were new work done for this course.

▪ Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is considered plagiarism. <mark>**Note that you must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and information from sources *where they appear in your text*. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself.**</mark> Readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. These requirements apply to assignments submitted in non-traditional formats (e.g., Web pages or visual media) and to material taken from such formats. For information about documentation styles, see the textbook or materials at http://www.ucalgary.ca/writingsupport/citationstyles If necessary, see the instructor for further guidance about whether or how to document a source.

▪ **Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct are serious offences: they can result in failure on an assignment, failure of the course, or even suspension or expulsion from university.** (See the *University of Calgary Calendar.*)

Research ethics

- Whenever you perform research with human participants (e.g., via surveys or interviews) as part of your university studies, you must follow university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor will submit a request for a course-based ethics approval. However, she (or her delegate) must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. If she has any concerns, she may direct your proposal to the faculty research ethics committee.

- For the optional blog article (based on an interview) and the usability study you will complete in Coms 363, research ethics requirements will apply. The requirements are explained in the assignment guidelines, and templates for letters of consent and survey use are provided under the ETHICS DOCS button in Blackboard. In your **proposal,** you must clearly explain exactly how you plan to comply with the research ethics guidelines for your major project. If you have any questions about the requirements, please contact the instructor. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see the Dept. of Communication and Culture Research Ethics site: http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/ethics

Students with Disabilities:

- If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre (220-8237) and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than 14 days after the start of the course.

Weekly Syllabus of Readings and Course Work

- Please use the Clickable Schedule on Blackboard; *it may include additional links or items.*

- *Chapters refer to Tebeaux and Dragga's (2010) The Essentials of Technical Communication.*

- *Scan = briefly review this source to get a sense of the contents, which may be useful in designing your usability study and developing your proposal or in completing other assignment..*

Tues., Sept. 13   Read 363 Course Outline and Introduction to Coms 363 online.
Recommended reading: Atkins, A. (2010). Digital strategies for group work. Retrieved from http://writingspaces.org/sites/default/files/atkins--collaborating-online.pdf

Thurs., Sept. 15   Read Ch. 1 ("Characteristics of Writing at Work" 8 pp)
Read Ch. 2 ("Writing for Your Readers" 20 pp)

Tues., Sept. 20   Read Ch. 3 ("Writing Ethically" 10 pp)
Read Ethics Docs section on BB
Read Appendix B section on APA

Thurs., Sept. 22   Read Ch. 7 ("E-mails, Memoranda, and Letters" 24 pp)

Tues., Sept. 27   **DUE: Quiz 1 (on Ch. 1, 2, 3, & 7) OR Discussion posting 1 (4%)**
Read Ch. 4 ("Achieving a Readable Style" 20 pp)
Scan Appendix A: Brief Guide to Grammar, Punctuation, and Usage

Thurs., Sept. 29   Read Ch. 5 ("Designing Documents" 24 pp)

Tues., Oct. 4   Read Ch. 6 (Designing Illustrations" 32 pp)

Thurs., Oct. 6   **DUE: Quiz 2 (on Ch. 4, 5, & 6) OR discussion posting 2 (4%)**

Tues., Oct. 11   **DUE: Recommendation memo OR blog article (20%)**
Read Ch. 9 ("Proposals and Progress Reports" 36 pp)

Thurs., Oct. 13	Read Ch. 8 ("Technical Reports 49 pp)
Tues., Oct. 18	**DUE: Quiz 3 (on Ch. 8 & 9) OR Discussion posting 3 (4%)** Read Project proposal & Report guidelines. Start work on proposal.
Thurs., Oct. 20	Scan Gullikson, S., et al.'s (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 Read Jerz, D. (2010). *Usability testing: 8 quick tips for designing tests.* Retrieved from http://jerz.setonhill.edu/design/usability/tips.htm Scan Lynch, P. J. & Horton, S. (2009).*Web style guide, 3rd edition*. Retrieved from http://webstyleguide.com/wsg3/index.html
Tues., Oct. 25	Read Morkes, J. & Nielsen, J. (1997). Concise, scannable, and objective: How to write for the web. Retrieved from http://www.useit.com/papers/webwriting/writing.html Read U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.a) Usability.gov Retrieved from http://www.usability.gov Scan U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.b). Guidelines. Usability.gov Retrieved from http://www.usability.gov/guidelines/index.html
Thurs., Oct. 27	Read Appendix C: Annotated Report for Study Read sample reports posted on Blackboard **DUE: Project proposal** (with group contract) **(10%)**
Tues., Nov. 1	Recommended reading: Few, S. (2007). Save the pies for dessert. Retrieved from http://www.perceptualedge.com/articles/08-21-07.pdf Recommended scanning: North Carolina State University (NCSU). (2004). LabWrite Resources, at http://labwrite.ncsu.edu/res/res-homepage.htm
Thurs., Nov. 3	Read Ch. 10 ("Instructions, Procedures, and Policies" 28 pp)
Tues., Nov. 8	Read Ch. 11 ("Oral Reports" 26 pp) View PowerPoint: Using PowerPoint Intelligently (on Blackboard) **DUE: Quiz 4 (on Ch. 10, 11, & PPT on PPTs) OR Discussion posting 4 (4%)**
Thurs., Nov. 10	**Reading day**
Tues., Nov. 15	**DUE: Critique of two visuals (10%)**
Thurs., Nov. 17	Work on usability study
Tues., Nov. 22	Work on usability study
Thurs., Nov. 24	Work on usability study & PowerPoint presentation
Tues., Nov. 29	**DUE: PowerPoint presentation (& notes) (10%)**
Thurs., Dec. 1	**DUE: Draft report: submit for peer review**
Tues., Dec. 6	**DUE: Email memo to peers (review of their report draft) (4%)**
Thurs., Dec. 8	**DUE: Final report (with letter of transmittal) (30%)**