

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

COMS 363: Professional and Technical Communication (L02)
Fall 2012: Wed., Sept. 5 – Wed., Dec. 5

An on-line course on the Blackboard system

Instructor:	Jo-Anne Andre, M.A.	Office Location:	SS 350
Office Phone:	(403) 220-7429	Email:	andre@ucalgary.ca
Blackboard Login:	https://blackboard.ucalgary.ca/webapps/login/		
Office Hours:	Thursdays 3:00 to 5:00 pm or by appointment		

Additional information:

- There will be no virtual or in person class meetings
- When emailing the instructor, please put 363 in the subject line
- Please check the Blackboard site frequently for announcements about assignments and additional course materials
- Appendix A provides a course overview with required readings

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
- familiarity with tools for online research and competence in the use of a standard style of documentation (e.g., APA)
- 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:

Graves, H., & Graves. R. (2012). *A strategic guide to technical communication*, 2ND ed. Peterborough ON: Broadview Press.

Additional course readings and resources are listed in the Overview in Appendix A. You are responsible for devising a schedule of readings for yourself.

Assignments & due dates:

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

5%	Quiz 1 (on Ch. 1, 2, 3, & 4)	Wed., Sept. 26, 2012*
15%	Short report (1000-1400 words)	Wed., Oct. 10
5%	Quiz 2 (on Ch. 8, 9, 11, 12, & 13)	Wed., Oct. 24
15%	Project proposal (4-6 pages)	Wed., Oct. 31 (group)**
5%	Quiz 3 (on Ch. 5, 6, 7, & 10)	Wed., Nov. 14
15%	Visual critique memo (700-1100 words)	Wed., Nov. 21
10%	PowerPoint presentation (10 slides)	Wed., Nov. 28 (group)**
30%	Usability study final report (12-17 pages)	Wed., Dec. 5 (group)**

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

* **Quizzes:** Quizzes are open-book and are to be done individually without collaboration. They will remain open for 7 days past the due date. There are no late penalties on quizzes, but quizzes not submitted within the 7-day grace period will earn a zero.

****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.

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
1	Anabelle Fournier	anabellebf@gmail.com
2	Andrea Hanslip	andreamarker@mac.com
3	Sarah Lockwood	slockwoo@ucalgary.ca
4	Christine Sopczak	cmsopcza@ucalgary.ca
6	Jo-Anne Andre	andre@ucalgary.ca

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. To retrieve your marked assignments, go to My Grades (under Tools) and click on the link provided.
- **If you are uploading an assignment and get an error message saying "Please enter a valid file," the problem is actually an incompatible browser.** Firefox 4 or higher 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>.
- Keep a copy of all assignments submitted. Consider a free service like Box.com to store assignment copies so that they can be accessed from anywhere.

- Please use .docx and .pptx (or .rtf) file formats for assignments. Avoid .pdf files as markers cannot add comments to them.
- 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 stated maximum 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 (a Wednesday), but **you will be allowed a 48-hour grace period with no late penalty on all assignments except the final report.** For each day late beyond the grace period (including Saturdays and Sundays), one letter grade level (e.g., B to B-) will be deducted. If you require an extension, email the instructor.

Grade appeals

- Within 15 days of the return of an assignment, students may request a reassessment. 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.

Grading 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%	<p>Note: Except for F grades and quiz grades, the midpoints of the percentage ranges will be used for calculating final grades.</p> <p>Grades for quizzes and discussion board postings will be entered as scores out of 100.</p>
A	90 – 95.99	93.0	
A -	85 – 89.99	87.5	
B+	80 – 84.99	82.5	
B	75 – 79.99	77.5	
B-	70 - 74.99	72.5	
C+	65 - 69.99	67.5	
C	60 - 64.99	62.5	
C-	55 - 59.99	57.5	
D+	53 - 54.99	54.0	
D	50 - 52.99	51.5	
F	0 - 49.99	0.01	

Group project & group grades

- Students who choose to work in a group on the usability study and related assignments will receive the same grade on the group assignments. Group assignments should include only the names of members who contributed to the assignment in some way.
- You may form groups of your own choosing. See Blackboard for more information.

Plagiarism:

- **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*.) Each year, I typically encounter 5 or 6 cases of plagiarism. Students who have plagiarized usually receive an F on the assignment and the course, the Dean of their faculty is notified, and they may face suspension. Be aware that we keep a copy of previous Coms 363 assignments on file and can easily check if an assignment has been submitted before. Please do not take a chance and submit someone else's work as your own.
- Unintentional plagiarism can result from careless note-taking practices. **When making notes on sources that you may be using in an assignment, always put quotation marks around the words from the source and make a note of the source and page number.** That way, when you are using your notes as you draft your documents, you will know which phrases came directly from a source and you will be able to properly document that source.
- 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 you do the corrections and the rewriting.
- Be aware that all of the following constitute plagiarism:
 - **using wording, ideas, information, or graphics from published material or the internet without citing the source—even when you state the information in your own words.**
 - **taking wording from published or online material without using quotation marks** (or formatting long quoted passages according to documentation conventions).
 - 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. **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.** 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 materials at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/writingsupport/citationstyles> or contact the instructor for guidance.

Research ethics

- Whenever you perform research with human participants, including surveys or interviews, you must follow university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor has received a course-based ethics approval for the usability study assignment in Coms 363. However, she (or her delegate) must review and approve of your research plans (in your proposal). If your instructor has any concerns, she may direct your proposal to the faculty research ethics committee.
- For Coms 363, the research ethics 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 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.

Appendix A: OVERVIEW: Coms 363 (L02) Fall 2012		Instructor: J. Andre
Due	Deliverable	Supporting readings & resources
Part 1: Foundations of technical communication		
Sept. 26	Quiz 1 (Ch. 1,2, 3, & 4 + APA & Editing materials) (5%)	Course outline & Intro to Coms 363 (2012) on Blackboard Guidelines for short report assignment Materials under APA DOCS & EDITING buttons on Blackboard
Oct. 10	Short report (15%)	Ch. 1 Thinking about audience, purpose, & genre (28 pp) Ch. 2 Leading and misleading the reader (13 pp) Ch. 3 Researching technical subjects (21 pp) Ch. 4 Writing technical prose (21 pp) Ch. 9 Reporting technical information (38 pp) Farkas, J. (2009, Aug. 29). Online word processor comparison: Google Docs vs. Zoho Documents, SkyDrive, Box.net. [Blog message]. Retrieved from http://www.40tech.com/2010/08/29/online-word-processor-comparison/ Pierce, D. (2009, March 26). 5 great alternatives to Google docs you should consider. Retrieved from http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/5-great-alternatives-to-google-docs-you-should-consider/
Part 2: Major project – Usability study of a website (* = group tasks)		
Oct. 24	Quiz 2 (Ch. 8, 9, 11, 12, & 13) (5%)	Guidelines for proposal, usability study, & PPT task + samples on BB Materials under ETHICS DOCS button on Blackboard
Oct. 31	*Proposal (15%)	Ch. 8 Writing winning proposals (27 pp) Ch. 11 Testing and reporting document usability (21 pp)
Nov. 28	*PowerPoint (10%)	Ch. 12 Taking technical communication online (21 pp) Ch. 13 Presenting technical information orally (13 pp)
Dec. 5	*Usability study report (30%) <i>Note: you may opt to do this set of projects on your own, but working in a team is recommended.</i>	Brent, D., & Andre, J. (2011). Using PowerPoint Intelligently [PPT on BB] Gullikson, S., et al.'s (1999). The impact of information architecture on academic web site usability. <i>The Electronic Library</i> 17(5), 293-304. Retrieved from https://www.unc.edu/~acrystal/110-117/gullikson.pdf Jerz, D. (2010). Usability testing: 8 quick tips for designing tests. Retrieved from http://jerz.setonhill.edu/design/usability/tips.htm Lynch, P. J. & Horton, S. (2009). <i>Web style guide</i> , 3 rd ed. Retrieved from http://webstyleguide.com/wsg3/index.html 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 U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. (n.d). [Sections on usability basics, methods, & guidelines] Retrieved from http://www.usability.gov
Part 3: Skills & strategies for technical communication		
Nov. 14	Quiz 3 (Ch. 5, 6, 7 & 10 & Few, 2007)(5%)	Guidelines for Visual critique memo Ch. 5 Designing documents and page layout (18 pp) Ch. 6 Communicating through visuals (11 pp)
Nov. 21	Visual critique memo (15%)	Ch. 7 Writing email and letters for the workplace (13 pp) Ch. 10 Writing how-to documents (23 pp) 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