

University of Calgary
Department of Communication and Culture

COMS 363, Lecture 5
Professional and Technical Communication
Fall 2014

Thursday, September 11, 2014 – Thursday, December 4, 2014

Thursdays 18:30 to 21:15

Instructor: Sharon Ramraj-Thompson
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Web Page: D2L available through MyUofC portal
Office Hours: Thursdays 18:00 to 18:30

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*, 2ND 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

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

Note: 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.

Page ranges are for single-spaced text.

- 20% **Visual critique memo** (individual). (3-4 pages) due Thursday, September 25, 2014 in class, hard copy required
- 15% **Project proposal** for website usability study (3-4 pages) (group) due Thursday, October 9, 2014. Hard copy required. One copy per group
- 10% **Quiz** on Graves and Graves text Chapters 2 and 4, in class, Thursday, October 30, 2014
- 15% **Group presentation** on usability study (10 minutes) due on Thursday, November 13, 2014
- 30% **Final report** for website usability study (17-20pages) (group) due Thursday, November 27, 2014
- 10% **Cover letter** (individual, 1-2 pages, in class) written on Thursday, December 4, 2014.

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.

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 & Dept of Communication and Culture Grade Scale

Work in this course will be graded using letter grades and percentage grades. The following grade scale percentage equivalents are used in Communication and Culture:

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 <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/node/208> . If you have questions about how to document sources, please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3rd 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/research/research-ethics>

This course allows students to conduct and act as participants in primary research which involves creating a survey and participating in a survey. The survey participation will be on an anonymous basis. An Application for approval from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee has been submitted.

Important information, services, and contacts for students

For information about . . .	Visit or contact . . .
ARTS PROGRAM ADVISING (PIC)	SS 102 403-220-3580 picarts@ucalgary.ca
CAMPUS SECURITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calgary Police Service • Emergency Text Messaging • Emergency Evacuation & Assembly • Safewalk Program 	http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/ 403-220-5333 403-266-1234 Emergency: call 911 http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints If you feel uncomfortable walking alone at any time, call Campus Security for an escort (220-5333). For more information, see http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/
DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT help line 	http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students 403-220-5555 or itsupport@ucalgary.ca
STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing Support Services • Student Services Mobile App 	http://ucalgary.ca/ssc http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents
STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty of Arts Reps 	http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/governance/elections/home.html

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Ombudsman 	http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds
<p>SU WELLNESS CENTRE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselling Services • Health Services • Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE • Online resources and tips 	<p>403-210-9355 (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health</p> <p>403-266-HELP (4357)</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus</p> <p>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.</p>

Schedule of Lectures and Readings

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

Any changes to this schedule will be posted on D2L

Thursday, September 11, 2014

Focus: Overview of course; basic concepts--audience, purpose & genre; workplace genres (email, letters, memo-reports)

Read for class

- Coms 363 course outline
- Ch. 1 Thinking about audience, purpose, & genre (exclude pages 52-56)
- Ch. 7 Writing emails and letters for the workplace

Lab: Formation of website usability study groups; choice of website to study; development of group contract (email to the instructor)

Thursday, September 18, 2014

Focus: Using visuals effectively

Read for class

- **Visual critique assignment guidelines** (to be posted on Blackboard)
- 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>

- o Malamed, C. (2010). Guidelines for designing tables. Retrieved August 5, 2011, from <http://understandinggraphics.com/design/data-table-design/>
- o 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, September 25, 2014

Visual critique assignment due in memo report format (20%) due at the beginning of class

Focus: Researching technical subjects; usability testing; proposal writing; research ethics

Read for class

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

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

Thursday, October 2, 2014

Focus: APA style; parallelism; writing style and editing

Proposal writing: handling criteria for evaluation

Read for class

- o Ch. 5 Designing documents and page layout
 - o Ch. 12 Taking technical communication online
 - o Handout on Parallelism (to be posted on Blackboard)
 - o APA Materials (to be posted on Blackboard)
- 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, 3rd 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 December 14, 2012, from <http://www.usability.gov>

- **Lab:** finalize usability evaluation criteria; write research methods section; draft usability test instructions or survey

Thursday, October 9, 2014

Project proposal for website usability study (group) (15%) due at the beginning of class.

You will also need to include

- a complete copy of your in-person usability test plans and instructions OR
- a complete copy of your online usability test formatted using SurveyMonkey. Include a working link for the instructor to test your survey.

Lab: complete drafting usability test instructions or survey

Thursday October 16, 2014

Focus: Strategies for effective writing and editing

Read for class

- Ch. 4 Writing technical prose
- Ch. 2 Leading and Misleading the reader
- Other grammar and editing handouts will be posted on D2L

Thursday, October 23, 2014

- **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.

Thursday October 30, 2014

Quiz on Chapters 4 and 2 of Graves – in class (10%)

- **Focus:** Oral Presentations
- **Read for class**
 - Ch. 13 Presenting technical information orally
- **LAB:** Work on PowerPoints for group presentations

Thursday, November 6, 2014

- Work and practice group presentations and continue work on project

Thursday, November 13, 2014

Group presentations on usability study projects (15%)

Thursday, November 20, 2014

Lab: Work on Final Report – due Thursday November 27. 2014

Thursday, November 27, 2014

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

Focus: Resume writing and cover letters

Read for Class:

Graves and Graves Chapter 1, pages 52-56 (resume and cover letter writing)

Thursday, December 4, 2014

Final Cover Letter and Resume assignment- in class (10%)