

Communications Studies (COMS) 363 L22
Professional and Technical Communication
Spring 2012
TR 09:00 – 11:50

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Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to professional and technical communication, both written and oral. Every workplace calls for different conventions of writing and different generic forms. This course is not intended to provide a cookbook of all the different recipes you might need; rather, it will help you develop general concepts and tools to better make sense of workplace writing situations as they arise.

Objectives of the Course

- a rhetorical approach to crafting documents—one in which you critically consider your purpose in writing, the needs of your audience(s), and relevant features of the context in which you write;
- an understanding of current theories of genre and familiarity with the conventions of and strategies for a range of written genres, including business correspondence, proposals, and reports;
- document design strategies to ensure that your documents look professional, promote easy retrieval of information, and use visuals to communicate information effectively;
- writing strategies to keep your writing focused, coherent, and readable;
- a sound command of the mechanics of writing and the skills to edit effectively to eliminate common errors in sentence structure, grammar, word use, spelling, and punctuation;
- competence in the use of a standard style of documentation (APA);
- familiarity with a range of resources for professional writers, including tools for online research, for online composing, and (potentially) for collaborative writing;
- skills in conducting primary research (usability analysis, surveys);
- competence in preparing and performing oral presentations.

The course will also give you the opportunity to develop your skills as an effective member of a collaborative writing team. However, completing your final project with a group is optional, not mandatory.

Internet and electronic communication device information

This course is conducted in a seminar format, meaning that the instructor will deliver lessons based on the readings and material, while engaging the class in discussion and feedback on that material. This means that any communication with people outside the class, who are not part of this conversation, is an interruption and should be conducted elsewhere. Turn your phones off and put them away during class time, use your laptops for notes only, and expect to be called on to join the conversation in class. During those classes where we use the computers in the Tri-lab to write essays, internet use is strictly limited to the essay assignment at that time.

Textbooks and Readings:

Tebeaux, Elizabeth and Sam Dragga (2012) *The Essentials of technical communication*, Second Edition. New York, NY. Oxford UP.

*Additional readings and resource materials will be provided in class or posted on the course Blackboard site.

Assignments and Evaluation

It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment. All assignments are due in class and will not be accepted via email unless expressly indicated in the assignment. Please hand in your essays directly to your 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.

10% Date: class work throughout the semester

Throughout the term, we will engage in a series of in-class exercises and practice assignments in order to engage with the lessons and readings more effectively. The mark is based on the participation of students in these assignments and students should demonstrate a reasonable effort to have completed them according to instructions. Written exercises will receive feedback from the instructor.

10% Date: May 15

Introductory paper. A short (500 word) reading-response paper, written in class on a reading and topic question to be assigned in that class. This paper will introduce the idea of genre shift to students and serve as a benchmark for writing from which progress on writing mechanics and organization can be assessed.

15% Due: Beginning of class, May 29

Final project proposal. Students must deliver a formal proposal for their course of research on the final project. This 2-4 page (further details to be provided) proposal will show research methodology and timelines for the final project.

15% Due: Beginning of Class, June 7

Graphic analysis paper. This short (500 word) take-home essay will require students to perform a formal analysis of web graphics as a precursor to the final project. Students will get two weeks to work on the essay.

20% Due: In class, June 19 – 21

Oral presentation & notes. Students must, as one of the deliverables in their final research project, give a formal, 15-20 minute presentation on their findings and outcomes from that research. Presentation schedules will be made later in the term but all students should reasonably be ready to present on the first date, as their research report will be due that day. Students who do their research projects as groups shall present their work in groups.

30% Due: Beginning of class, June 19

Final report with letter of transmittal. Using the techniques learned throughout the term, students, either singly or in groups, will represent themselves as consultants to conduct a program of primary and secondary research on website usability. This assignment will assess students' ability to adhere to formal research methodology and to communicate findings in a clear and effective manner. Reports will be 11-16 pages long for individuals and 13-16 pages for groups.

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

Note: Please hand in your assignments directly to your 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.

A note on word count

A supervisor who asks for a two-page memo either will not read a four-page response, or will not be in the best frame of mind when doing so. However, if it leaks a little onto the third page, and has enough real meat to make it worth reading, few supervisors will complain. With this in mind, then:

1. All assignments should stick as closely as possible to the assigned length. Your instructor has a clear idea what can be achieved within a specific length and a truly excellent assignment nails the question exactly, at the suggested length.
2. There is, however, a 10% grace in length. Therefore, a 500-word assignment would not be actively penalized unless it came in under 450 words or over 550 words. No assignment, however brilliant otherwise, would receive a clear A without falling into the 10% word count range. Note that the report assignment does specifically allow for more than the suggested page length if it contains bulky visuals. Otherwise the same rules apply to pages as well as number of words. Do not try to keep down to the required length by using narrow margins and teeny font.

Group project option:

The proposal, presentation, and final report may be done individually or in a group of up to four members. If you know someone with whom you would like to work, you may form a group. If you form a group and would like your group space enabled on Blackboard, please email the instructor with the names of all your group members. Group spaces include a private discussion board, a file exchange tool, and a group email feature.

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

Policy for Late Assignments

- Extensions will be granted only by the instructor and only with good reason.
- Assignments will normally be returned within two weeks.
- All assignments are due at the beginning of class unless written in class. Anytime later that day the assignments will be considered one day late; late assignments will be penalized a part grade (i.e. from B+ to B) per day.

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

This course is conducted in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP). As one consequence, **students should identify themselves on all written work by placing their name on the front page and their ID number. Also you will be required to provide a piece of picture identification in order to pick up an assignment or look at a final exam from SS320 after classes have ended.**

For more information see also <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>.

Writing Skills Statement

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, although to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see <http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. 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

The following grading system is used in the Department of Communication and Culture:
(Revised, effective September 2008)

	Grading Scale
A+	96-100
A	90-95.99

A -	85-89.99
B+	80-84.99
B	75-79.99
B-	70-74.99
C+	65-69.99
C	60-64.99
C-	55-59.99
D+	53-54.99
D	50-52.99
F	0-49

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

Note on group grades:

All group members will normally receive the same grade on group assignments. It is up to each group to ensure that the group's workload is distributed fairly among members and that all group members have a chance to review the final draft of any group document before it is submitted. Note that if a group member's name appears on an assignment but that group member did not contribute to the document, he or she is guilty of plagiarism. Group assignments should include only the names of members who contributed to the document. See the instructor early in the term if you would like help with group contracts (which are helpful but not necessary for the course).

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. Readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. This includes assignments submitted in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media, and material taken from such sources.

Please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3rd Floor Taylor Digital Family Library, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>) if you have any questions regarding how to document sources.

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>

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 fourteen (14) days after the start of the course.

Students' Union

For details about the current Students' Union contacts for the Faculty of Arts see <http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/governance/elections/home.html>

Student Ombudsman

For details on the Student Ombudsman's Office see <http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/services/student-services/student-rights.html>

Emergency Evacuation and Assembly points

For information on the emergency evacuation procedures and the assembly points see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>

"SAFEWALK" Program -- 220-5333

Campus Security will escort individuals day or night -- call 220-5333 for assistance. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking lot booths.

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

The Department of Communication and Culture Research Ethics site:
<http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/ethics>

or the University of Calgary Research Ethics site:
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/cfreb>

Schedule of Lectures and Readings

- Week of May 9:**
- Introduction to course
 - Chapters 1 and 2 of Tebeaux and Dragga
 - Andre and Schneider article

- Week of May 14:**
- Chapters 4 and 9 of Tebeaux and Dragga
 - Introductory In-class Paper (May 15)
 - FMP #1
 - Finalize project groups
- Week of May 21:**
- Chapters 3 and 6 of Tebeaux and Dragga
 - Gopen and Swan Article
- Week of May 28:**
- Chapters 5 and 8 of Tebeaux and Dragga
 - FMP #2
 - Research Proposal Due (May 29)
- Week of June 4:**
- Chapters 7 and 11 of Tebeaux and Dragga
 - FMP #3
 - Graphic Analysis Due (June 7)
- Week of June 11:**
- Chapter 12 of Tebeaux and Dragga
 - Grammar from top to bottom
 - FMP #4
- Week of June 18:**
- FMP #5
 - Oral Reports

***Notes regarding this schedule:**

Be aware that this schedule is intended as a rough guideline to help you manage your resources for class. While no marks are directly assigned for class attendance, students who do not attend all classes punctually tend to achieve lower results than students who attend punctually and who participate in all aspects of the course.

All assignments are due at or take place at the beginning of class, including the Five Minute Papers. No grace will be given on those papers for students who show up late or do not show up without having made prior arrangements with the instructor.

Oral Reports will be scheduled by the instructor and all students should be prepared to present at the beginning of class. Attendance for these presentations is mandatory and one part of a letter grade will count towards students' individual Oral Report grades for attendance at all presentation dates; for example, a B grade would become a B+.