

Communications Studies COMS 363 (L23)
Professional and Technical Communication

Spring 2013
Tuesdays and Thursday – 12:00 to 14:45
May 14, 2013 – June 25, 2013

Instructor: Sharon Ramraj-Thompson
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Office Hours: Thursdays 2:45 to 3:45 or by appointment

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.

Internet and electronic communication device information:

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

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

Assignments & evaluation:

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

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.

- 0 Group contract (required but unmarked)
- 10% **Quiz 1**– Chapters 1 and 7 of Graves and Graves Text – Thursday May 16, 2013.
- 15% **Visual critique memo** (individual). (3-4 pages) due Tuesday May 21, 2013 at the beginning of class
- 15% **Project proposal** for website usability study (3-4 pages) (group) due on Tuesday May 28, 2013 at the beginning of class
- 5% **Quiz 2** – Grammar test on Thursday June 6, 2013.
- 15% **Group presentation** on usability study (10 minutes). Thursday, June 13, 2013
- 30% **Final report** for website usability study (17-20pages) (group) due Thursday June 20, 2013 at the beginning of class.
- 10% **Cover letter** (individual, 1-2 pages, in class) written on Tuesday June 25, 2013.

Quizzes: **Quiz 1** is a brief multiple-choice test. **Quiz 2** is an editing test. These tests are designed to ensure that you read and understand the technical terms and concepts of the indicated Chapters of the textbook and the material covered in the class.

The **visual critique memo** is a brief 3-4 page assignment that asks you to select a visual and discuss its effectiveness using criteria studied in the course.

The **proposal, PowerPoint and final report** are linked assignments. The final report is a full-featured, substantive report (4250-5000 words), not counting letter of transmittal, references and appendices) on a web site usability study. It will require you to conduct both secondary and primary research and integrate the results into a report. The proposal will summarize your plans for the report

so that your marker can supply critique and advice. The PowerPoint assignment will be a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the report. These three assignments will be completed in a group

The **cover letter** is an assignment designed to give you practice applying for a hypothetical job and catering your cover letter towards that position, using the information and tips from the Graves and Graves text.

A detailed course syllabus is provided at the end of this course outline.

Registrar-scheduled final exam: NO

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.

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://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:

	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
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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.

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 Family Digital 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.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds>

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/ethics/cfreb>

Your instructor has applied for course-based ethics approval for Coms 363. However, she must review and approve of your research plans, as set out 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 anonymous surveys are provided in on Blackboard.
- In your usability study **proposal**, you must clearly explain exactly how you plan to comply with the research ethics guidelines for your usability study 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>

Detailed schedule of Lectures and Readings

(all chapters are from Graves and Graves, 2012)

Any changes or revisions to the schedule will be posted on Blackboard.

Tuesday May 14, 2013

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 (not including 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 May 16, 2013

In-class Quiz on Chapters 1 and 7 of Graves and Graves (10%)

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](http://perceptualedge.com/articles/08-21-07.pdf)

- o 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

Tuesday May 21, 2013

Visual critique assignments due in memo report format (15%) 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 May 23, 2013

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

Tuesday, May 28, 2013

Submit Project proposal for website usability study (group) (15%) 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.

Focus and Lab: complete drafting usability test instructions or survey

Thursday, May 30, 2013

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.

Tuesday June 4, 2013

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 Blackboard

Thursday, June 6, 2013

In class Quiz on Grammar (5%)

Focus: Report writing: process, writing the cover letter, introduction, methods, criteria, and findings

Read for class

- Guidelines for the final report assignment (to be posted on Blackboard)
- Ch. 9 Reporting technical information

Lab: Some time will be allowed for group work on your final report

Tuesday, June 11, 2013

Focus: Oral Presentations

Read for class

- Ch. 13 Presenting technical information orally

Lab: Work on PowerPoints for group presentations

Thursday June 13, 2013

Group presentations on usability study projects (15%)

Tuesday, June 18, 2013

Focus and Lab: Work on Final Report – due Thursday June 20, 2013

Thursday, June 20, 2013

Submit Final report for website usability study (group) (30%)

Focus: Resume writing and cover letters

Read for Class: Graves and Graves, Chapter 1, pages 52-56

Tuesday, June 25, 2013

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