

Communication Studies COMS363 L27
Professional and Technical Communication
Spring 2013
Tuesdays & Thursdays 18:00-20:45

Instructor: Rebecca C. Den Hoed
Office Location: SS 337
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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

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.

Additional Information

Course projects will focus on professional and technical communication for a variety of industries. Students should be prepared to research and communicate about topics beyond their own technical/professional expertise. However, students can select the topic of their group project and are encouraged to choose a topic associated with their area(s) of study.

Objectives of the Course

The course will help you develop:

- a rhetorical approach to crafting documents in which you critically consider your purpose, the needs of your audience, and relevant context;
- a familiarity with the conventions and composing strategies for a range of technical and professional genres, including professional correspondence, proposals, reports, presentations, and fact sheets;
- document design strategies to ensure documents look professional, promote easy information retrieval, and use visuals effectively;
- writing strategies to keep 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 using a standard style of documentation (e.g., IEEE, APA, MLA).

Internet and electronic communication information

Electronic devices in the classroom: Students are welcome to use electronic devices in class (laptops, tablets, phones) for course-related communications. Students who need to use electronic devices for non-course-related reasons during class will be asked to leave the room while doing so, to avoid distracting other students and the instructor.

Recording lectures: Recording any part of any lecture in any form without permission is not permitted. Lecture slides and notes will not be posted on the web. Photographing lecture slides is not permitted. These restrictions are due to copyright and intellectual property issues and are strictly enforced.

E-mail Policy: When emailing the instructor, make sure COMS 363.L27 is in the subject line and your name is in the “from” line. You can expect a response from your instructor within 24 hours. Unless you are given explicit permission to do so, do not email assignments to the instructor for grading or drafts of assignments for feedback.

Blackboard E-mail: Announcements are sometimes emailed to students *via* Blackboard. It is your responsibility to make sure Blackboard has an up-to-date email address for you. Before the course begins, please log in to blackboard and send yourself an email. If you do not receive the email, you will need to update your email address in the University of Calgary system. To do this, follow the instructions at <http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/blackboard/email>.

Textbooks and Readings

Alred, GJ, Brusaw, T, Oliu, WE. (2011). Handbook of Technical Writing. 10th Edition. Bedford/St. Martin's.

A schedule of readings is outlined below and will be posted on the course website.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment 1 – Letter* (5%) SOLO	6PM Tuesday May 21, 2013
Assignment 2 – Memo* (15%) SOLO	6PM Tuesday May 28, 2013
Group Work Contract* (ungraded) GROUP	IN CLASS Tuesday May 28, 2013
Assignment 3 – Proposal (15%) GROUP	6PM Thursday June 6, 2013
Assignment 4 – Presentation (15%) GROUP	6PM Tuesday June 18, 2013
Assignment 5 – Formal Report (25%) GROUP	6PM Thursday June 20, 2013
Assignment 6 – Fact Sheet (15%) SOLO	6PM Tuesday June 25, 2013
Assignment 7 – Editing* (10%) GROUP	IN CLASS Tuesday June 25, 2013

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

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

Assignment Submission

Assignments marked with an * are to be emailed to the instructor using the file format(s) and file name(s) specified in the (Blackboard) assignment description.

All other assignments are to be submitted to the instructor in person (paper copy or in-person attendance) at the beginning of class on the due date. 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.

It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment. Students are encouraged to use a free service like Dropbox.com to store assignment copies so they can be accessed anywhere.

Assignment Details

Brief assignment descriptions follow. More detailed assignment descriptions will be posted on the course website.

Assignment 1 – Letter: Write a brief (300-500 word) letter to a customer who has complained about a company product (the specifics of the complaint will be given). The letter should cover key technical aspects of the product and address the customer both courteously and professionally.

Assignment 2 – Memo: Write a brief (900-1000 word) memo-report analyzing and critiquing an example of visual communication (the visual will be assigned). The memo should also make recommendations for improving the visual.

Assignments 3-5 – Proposal, Presentation, and Formal Report: These are linked assignments to be completed in groups of 2-3. The proposal is a formal response (500-600 words/ per group member) to an RFP for a website usability test. The proposal should outline the group's plan to conduct the requested usability test (and include, among other things, the group's planned research methods and usability test instructions and/or usability survey/questionnaire) and should be crafted *persuasively* to win the bid. The presentation should be a professional "slideware" presentation summarizing the group's findings and recommendations from the usability test (3 min. / group member). The final report should be a full-featured, substantive report (900-1000 words / group

member, *not including* letter of transmittal, references, or appendices) of the group's findings and recommendations. Each group must email a group work contract to the instructor. Students who fail to fulfill the terms of their group contract might be subject to penalties (agreed upon in advance by the group) and/or be ineligible to complete the assignment with their group.

Assignment 6 – Fact Sheet: Design and write a “1-pager” for a company that has ordered a fact sheet (the topic will be assigned). The fact sheet should incorporate visual, layout, and writing elements, and should meet the specifications outlined by the company.

Assignment 7 – Editing: Work in assigned groups to analyze the fact sheets designed and written by other students. Make recommendations (regarding content, writing, structure, and layout) to improve the fact sheets. Advocate for one (1) as “professional grade” and worthy of publication. Write up your recommendations as a memo-report (under 750 words) to your instructor.

Policy for Late Assignments & Extensions

Assignments are due by 6:00 pm on the due date (except for “in class” assignments, which are due at the end of class). Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late. If you need an extension, email the instructor at least 5 days before the assignment due date.

Grade appeals

Students may request a reassessment within 15 days of the return of an assignment. Such requests should be emailed to the instructor and should explain the grounds for the reassessment. Grades may be increased or lowered on appeal. As explained in the University Calendar (2012, p. 46), reassessed grades may be further appealed at the department level within 15 days.

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>

Group Project & Grades

All groups are required to develop group contracts in which they specify expectations about workload, quality of work, modes and timeliness of communication, and attendance at group meetings and at classes in which groups will be allowed time for group work. Groups should also consider penalties for non-compliance. In extreme cases, penalties may include expulsion from the group, in which case, the expelled member will be required to complete all remaining group assignments on his or her own. All members are required to sign the group contract indicating their agreement with the terms set out.

Students working in a group will normally 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. If a group is having an issue with a group member (or vice versa), please make an appointment to meet with the instructor to find a resolution.

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

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 COMS363. 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 COMS363, the research ethics requirements are explained in the assignment guidelines, and templates for letters of consent and anonymous surveys are available 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 Department of Communication and Culture Research Ethics site:
<http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/ethics>

Schedule of Lectures and Readings

Tuesday May 14

Lecture: Purpose, Audience, Context, Genre

Readings: Five Steps to Successful Writing; Preparation (including Purpose; Audience; Context; Scope; Select the Medium)

Thursday May 16

Lecture: Correspondence & Style

Readings: Correspondence (including E-Mail; Letters; Memos); Acknowledgement Letters; Complaint Letters; Cover Letters; Reference Letters; Refusal Letters; Affectation; Technical Writing Style; Conciseness; Clarity; Telegraphic Style; “You” Viewpoint; Positive Writing; Tone; International Correspondence

Tuesday May 21

Lecture: Informal Reports & Organization

Readings: Informal Reports (including Feasibility Reports; Investigative Reports; Laboratory Reports; Progress and Activity Reports; Test Reports; Trip Reports; Trouble Reports); Organization; Methods of Development (Cause-and-Effect; Chronological; Comparison; Division-and-Classification; General and Specific; Sequential; Spatial); Headings; Lists; Parallel Structure

[Assignment 1 due](#)

Thursday May 23

Lecture: Design & Visuals

Readings: Layout and Design (including Forms; Headers and Footers; Headings; Lists); Visuals (including Drawings; Flowcharts; Global Graphics; Graphs; Maps; Mathematical Equations; Organizational Charts; Photographs; Tables)

Tuesday May 28

Lecture: Proposals; Collaborative Writing

Readings: Proposals (including Requests for Proposals); Persuasion; Cover Letter; Title; Table of Contents; Introduction; Conclusion; Documenting Sources; Research; Collaborative Writing; Conducting Meetings from Remote Locations; Creating on Outline; Creating Styles and Templates; Incorporating Track Changes; Reviewing Collaborative Documents; Coherence; Proofreading for Format Consistency

[Assignment 2 due](#)

Thursday May 30

Lecture: Usability Testing; Research and Documentation; Research Ethics

Readings: Usability Testing; Instructions; Forms Design; Interviewing for Information; Questionnaires; Listening; Paraphrasing; Plagiarism; Copyright; Documenting Sources; Research

Tuesday June 4

Lecture: Online Communication; Effective Writing

Readings: Blogs; Web Design; Writing for the Web; Style; Abstract/Concrete Words; Affectation; Agreement; Ambiguity; Awkwardness; Biased Language; Buzzwords; Clichés; Comma Splice; Contractions; Double Negatives; Emphasis; Euphemisms; Figures of Speech; Gobbledygook; Idioms; Intensifiers; Jargon; Nominalizations; Paragraphs; Possessive Case; Repetition; Run-on Sentences; Sentence Construction; Sentence Faults; Sentence Fragments; Sentence Variety; Subordination; Transitions; Vague Words; Voice

Thursday June 6

Lecture: Formal Reports

Readings: Formal Reports (including Title Page; Abstract; Executive Summary; Table of Contents; Introduction; Headings; Conclusions; Recommendations; References; Tables; Bibliography; Appendix; Glossary)

[Assignment 3 due](#)

Tuesday June 11

Lecture: n/a

Readings: n/a

** In-Class Usability Testing**

Thursday June 13

Lecture: Presentations

Readings: Presentations

Tuesday June 18

Lecture: n/a

Readings: n/a

In-Class Presentations

[Assignment 4 due](#)

Thursday June 20

Lecture: Fact Sheets

Readings: Definition Method of Development; Description; Instructions

[Assignment 5 due](#)

Tuesday June 25

Lecture: Technical Editing

Readings: Proofreading

In-Class Editing

[Assignments 6 & 7 due](#)