

Communications Studies COMS 363 – Lecture 01
Professional and Technical Communication
Winter 2011

An on-line course on the blackboard system: <https://blackboard.ucalgary.ca>

Instructor: Lisa Stowe
Office Location: SS 206
Office Phone: 403 220 4840
E-Mail: lstowe@ucalgary.ca
Web Page: NA
Office Hours: NA

Additional Information

*Please note: Put COMS 363 in your subject line so that I don't miss your message. Please read the entire course outline for valuable tips and advice on how to manage an online course.

Marking Groups and Markers: There are no face-to-face tutorials in this class; however, all students will be in one of six marking groups on Blackboard. These groups will be assigned at random after the drop/add date, but I may move some students later in the term either to balance marking loads or to bring together students who wish to collaborate on the final project. If you wish to change groups, please make your request as soon as possible. You must form your group (if you wish to work as a group) before the proposal is due.

Course Description

COMS 363 is an introduction to professional and technical communication. Note that this section of the course will be offered entirely online.

This class takes a rhetorical approach to understanding professional and technical communication. Emphasis is placed on how workplace communication is situated within distinct organizational or corporate cultures as well as broader socio-cultural contexts.

This class will not provide you with a cookie cutter approach to technical and professional writing; rather it will help you develop general concepts and tools to help

you make sense of the various workplace writing situations. Emphasis will be placed on audience and genre analysis to help determine the best possible technical or professional structure. COMS 363 will help you develop general concepts and tools to help you make sense of workplace writing situations as they arise.

Objectives of the Course

This course will help you develop:

- 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 are writing.
- an understanding of current theories of genre and familiarity with the conventions and composing 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.
- familiarity with a range of resources for professional writers, including tools for online research, for online composing, and for collaborative writing.
- skills in conducting primary research (usability analysis, surveys).
- competence in preparing PowerPoint presentations.

Internet and electronic communication device information

NA

Textbooks and Readings:

Tebeaux, Elizabeth and Sam Dragga (2010) *The Essentials of Technical Communication*. New York, NY. Oxford University Press. (Specific edition with access code for Symtech Liquid Book)

Please Note: Students must purchase this specific edition with the access code from the University of Calgary Bookstore in order to access the liquid book online that

has other readings for the class. Failure to purchase the text with the access code will put you in a very precarious position to successfully completing the course.

Technical requirements & support:

TO DO (1): Before the course begins, please visit the e-learning student help page: <http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/elearn/blackboard/students> Here, you will find helpful resources for Blackboard plus links to information about obtaining an IT account, changing your password, and updating your e-mail address in the system. Note that you must have an IT account in order to access Blackboard. If you already have an @ucalgary.ca e-mail address, you have the necessary IT account in place. Once you enter the Blackboard platform, check out the help resources located under the HELP button on the menu. As you'll see, these help resources include a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs). If you run into problems, please check this area first.

TO DO (2): Before the course begins, please go into the Blackboard site and send an e-mail to yourself. If you do not receive the e-mail, it is your responsibility to update your e-mail address in the system (at the link provided on the e-learn page. If you neglect to update your e-mail address in the system, you will miss important messages related to this online course.

Be sure to check your e-mail often and to keep your e-mail box cleaned out. If your e-mail box is full, you may miss important messages and returned course work as messages bounced back to the instructor because of full e-mailboxes will normally not be resent. (Returned messages because of full e-mail boxes tend to be a particular problem with Hotmail accounts.)

TO DO (3): If you do not have PowerPoint and MS Word on your computer, please visit the Microsoft download centre to download the PowerPoint and Word viewers: <http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/Search.aspx?displaylang=en>

You must have composing software that can generate files readable in Microsoft Word 2000 or higher. If you are not using Microsoft Word, please save your files in a Word-compatible format. If you are using Microsoft Word 2007, please use the save as feature to save all files as .doc (2003-style) rather than .docx (2007-style). Markers may have difficulty reading .docx files.

If you encounter technical problems, please contact the IT support desk (phone 220-5555 or e-mail itsupport@ucalgary.ca)

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignments:

- 14% Seven quizzes (2% each) on reading and editing (each quiz will be a short multiple-choice test in Blackboard)

- 8% Reading Response (500 words)
- 15% Project proposal
- 13% Comparative Analysis of Two Visuals
- 20% PowerPoint presentation & notes
- 30% Final report with Letter of Transmittal

Assignment Schedule:

Note: There will be an assignment or quiz, occasionally both, due almost every week.

Quizzes can be completed at any time up until midnight of the final day of classes. Quizzes are meant to help you work your way through the material so it is best if you keep on top of them and do them every week as the corresponding material is covered. After midnight on the final day of classes quizzes cannot be accessed so please remember to complete all quizzes before this deadline or risk losing a potential 14% of the class.

All other assignments are due on a Friday at 4:30pm Calgary time. There will be a two day grace period up until Sunday, at 4:30pm and if submitted after that period the assignment will be considered late and will be deducted late marks. Please note that if you submit an assignment during the grace period then the makers will also have a grace period and your assignment will be marked after all other assignments submitted by the Friday deadline are marked and returned.

All assignment guidelines will be posted on blackboard under the assignments tab.

Friday, Jan. 28: Reading response (500 words) (8%)

Friday, Feb. 18: Project proposal (15%)

Friday, March 18: Comparative analysis of graph or table (1200 words) (13%)

Friday April 1: PowerPoint presentation with notes (20%)

Friday April 15: Final report (30%)

Notes and advice on course work:

- Please download and follow the Printable Schedule of readings and assignments posted on the Blackboard site and listed below.
- Each assignment is linked from the Clickable Schedule. The assignment document includes information on the assignment, including information on how to submit assignments. Note that all assignments (except quizzes) must be completed in order to pass this course.
- Aim to manage your time effectively. Try to schedule at least five hours every week for reading and work on this course. Break your assignments down into manageable chunks and set a schedule for completing them. Your success in this online course will likely be a measure of your ability to be a well-organized and self-directed learner, a skill that you will bring with you into the workplace.
- If you have questions, don't hesitate to e-mail the instructor. I have asked marker to refer all general questions to me in order to ensure tat everyone gets the same answer.

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:

- All assignments should stick as closely as possible to the assigned length. A truly excellent assignment nails the question exactly and is the suggested length.
- However, there is a 10% grace in length. Therefore a 500-word assignment would not be actively penalized until it reached 550 words. Over 550, no assignment, however brilliant otherwise, would receive a clear A.
- Note that the report assignment specifically allows 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.
- Don't try to keep down to the required length by using narrow margins and teeny font. Your markers have all seen that trick before.

Group project option:

- The proposal, PowerPoint and final report may be done individually or in a group of up to three members. If you know someone whom you'd like to work with, you may form a group. Let me know who you are working with so that I can make sure you end up in the same marking group and are all marked by the same person.
- 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 (and indicate what marking section you are in.) Group spaces include a private discussion board, a file exchange tool, and a group email feature.

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.

Due dates, late policy, return of assignments, & grade appeals:

- You have an automatic 48-hour grace period on all assignments. Once the grace period has elapsed, late assignments will be docked one letter grade level (e.g., from B to B-) for each day the assignment is late (including weekend days). For example, an assignment due Wednesday but submitted the following Tuesday would have a four-level grade deduction for late submission. Assignments submitted late may or may not receive detailed comments. However, all assignments must nonetheless be submitted in order to pass the course, even if they are so late that they receive an F.
- Extensions will be granted only by the instructor and only with good reason. A carefully written memo to the instructor must outline in clear and concise language why you deserve an extension.

- Assignments will normally be returned within two weeks.
- If you wish to appeal your marker's grade on an assignment, please write the instructor (not the marker) an email explaining exactly why you think the grade should have been higher. You must address your marker's comments specifically and explain which ones you accept and which ones you think are unreasonable. Note, however, that grades may be lowered as well as increased on appeal.

NOTE: If you use the grace period, your marker gets a grace period too. Assignments submitted after the official deadline may not be returned before the next assignment is due.

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: **No**

Please note: If your class is held in the evening, the Registrar's Office will make every attempt to schedule the final exam during the evening; however, there is NO guarantee that the exam will NOT be scheduled during the day.

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://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: www.efwr.ucalgary.ca

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.

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 (MacEwan Student Centre 4th floor, efwr.ucalgary.ca) 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

To be posted on Blackboard before the semester begins.