

University of Calgary
Department of Communication and Culture, Faculty of Arts

COMS 363 (L02)
Professional and Technical Communication

Winter 2013
Mondays – 1:00 to 3:50 pm
Jan. 14 – April 15 (except February 18)

Instructor:	Jo-Anne Andre, M.A.	Office Location:	SS 350
Office Phone:	(403) 220-7429		
Email:	andre@ucalgary.ca (please put Coms 363 in the subject line)		
Office Hours:	Mondays: 4:00 to 5:00 pm & by appointment other weekdays		

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 this term will focus on professional and technical communication in the oil and gas industry. The major project in this course will be a usability study of a website related to the oil and gas sector. You will also produce a fact sheet for the Canadian Society for Unconventional Resources. Most classes will include a lab component, with time for group work and applied practice.

Course objectives:

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)
- 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.

Required 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 of the following must be completed in order to pass the course.

Page ranges are for single-spaced text.


---	Group contract (required but unmarked)	Mon., Jan. 14
15%	Visual critique (memo) (individual). (3-4 pp) In class	Mon., Jan. 21
15%	Project proposal for website usability study (3-4 pp) (group)	Fri., Feb. 8
10%	Group presentation on usability study (10-15 mins). In class	March 18 or 25
30%	Final report for website usability study (17-20pp) (group)	Mon., March 25
17%	Technical description (Fact Sheet) (2-4 pp) (individual or pair)	Mon., April 8
3%	Technical editing task. In class . (2 pp) (group)	Mon., April 8
10%	In-class test (2 hours)	Mon., April 15

Registrar-scheduled final exam: NO

For assignment information, see the information provided below and in the ASSIGNMENTS area in Blackboard. A detailed course syllabus is provided at the end of this course outline.

Course Information and Policies

Assignment submission, return, & important technical information

Unless stated otherwise in the assignment guidelines, please submit all assignments via the links provided in the ASSIGNMENTS area of Blackboard. Submitted assignments will show up as a  symbol in the grade book; if you do not see that symbol, your assignment has not been uploaded successfully. To retrieve your marked assignments, go to My Grades (under Tools) and click on the link provided.

If you are uploading an assignment and get an error message saying "Please enter a valid file," the problem is actually an incompatible browser. Firefox 4 or higher and Internet Explorer 9 are not supported browsers. Supported browsers for Blackboard 8 are listed here: <http://kb.blackboard.com/pages/viewpage.action?pagelId=57442326>.

Keep a copy of all assignments submitted. Consider a free service like Box.com or Google Drive to store assignment copies so that they can be accessed from anywhere.

Please use .docx and .pptx (or .rtf) file formats for assignments. Avoid .pdf files as markers cannot add comments to them. To minimize the chance of a file mix-up, please use the following format for naming your files: *363 proposal Smith, Ngo, & Carter.doc*

For information on Blackboard, look under the HELP button on the BB course menu for information and advice on information technology (IT) issues. For technical support, call the IT support desk (403-220-5555) or e-mail itsupport@ucalgary.ca

Extensions & late policy

Except where indicated on the assignment guidelines, assignments are due by 8:00 pm on the due date. For each day late (including Saturdays and Sundays), one letter grade level (e.g., B to B-) will be deducted. If you require an extension, please email the instructor.

Grade appeals

Within 15 days of the return of an assignment, students may request a reassessment. Such requests should be directed to the instructor (by email) and should clearly explain the grounds for the reassessment. Note that 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 <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 & group grades

All groups are encouraged 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 should sign the group contract indicating their agreement with the terms set out.

Students working in a group on the usability study and related assignments 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 scale

The following grading system is used in the Dept. of Communication and Culture. Except for exams, your assignments will be given letter grades, and the midpoints of the percentage ranges will be used for calculating final grades. Grades for exams will be entered as scores out of 100.

	Grading Scale	Midpoint (used for calculations)	GPA value (See U of C calendar, Academic Standing)
A+	96 - 100.00 %	98.0%	4.0
A	90 – 95.99	93.0	4.0
A -	85 – 89.99	87.5	3.7
B+	80 – 84.99	82.5	3.3
B	75 – 79.99	77.5	3.0
B-	70 - 74.99	72.5	2.7
C+	65 - 69.99	67.5	2.3
C	60 - 64.99	62.5	2.0
C-	55 - 59.99	57.5	1.7
D+	53 - 54.99	54.0	1.3
D	50 - 52.99	51.5	1.0
F	0 - 49.99	0.01	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. 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.

Citation guidelines for APA are included on the Blackboard course site. Additional resources on citation are available at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/node/208> 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.

Unintentional plagiarism can result from careless note-taking practices. When making notes on sources that you may be using in an assignment, always put quotation marks around the words from the source and make a note of the source and page number. That way, when you are using your notes as you draft your documents, you will know which phrases came directly from a source, and you will be able to properly document that source.

It is fine to discuss your ideas with others and to have someone review your written work to point out weaknesses and typos. These practices are common in the workplace and do not constitute plagiarism as long as you do the corrections and the rewriting.

Be aware that all of the following constitute plagiarism:

- using wording, ideas, information, or graphics from published material or the internet without citing the source—even when you state the information in your own words.
- taking wording from published or online material without using quotation marks (or formatting long quoted passages in block indent format according to documentation conventions of the style you are using).
- passing off the work of others as your own OR submitting work that you have done previously or that you are now doing for another course) as if it were new work done for this course.

Be aware that we keep a copy of previous Coms 363 assignments on file and can easily check if an assignment has been submitted before.

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.

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

- 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 under the ETHICS DOCS button in 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 for Coms 363 (L02) – Winter 2013

(all chapters are from Graves and Graves, 2012)

Mon., Jan. 14

- **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 (28 pp)
 - Ch. 7 Writing emails and letters for the workplace (13 pp)
- **Lab:** Formation of website usability study groups; choice of website to study; development of group contract (email to the instructor)

Mon., Jan. 21

- **Focus:** Using visuals effectively
- **Read for class**
 - **Visual critique assignment guidelines** (under ASSIGNMENTS on BB)
 - Ch. 6 Communicating through visuals (11 pp)
 - 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>
 - Malamed, C. (2010). Guidelines for designing tables. Retrieved August 5, 2011, from <http://understandinggraphics.com/design/data-table-design/>
 - 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)]
- **In-class assignment -- Visual critique (in memo-report format) (10%)**

Mon., Jan. 28

- **Focus:** Researching technical subjects; usability testing; proposal writing; research ethics
- **Read for class**
 - Proposal assignment guidelines (under ASSIGNMENTS on BB)
 - Ch. 3 Researching technical subjects (21 pp)
 - Ch. 11 Testing and reporting document usability (22 pp)
 - Jerz, D. (2010). Usability testing: 8 quick tips for designing tests. Retrieved from <http://jerz.setonhill.edu/design/usability/tips.htm>
 - Ch. 8 Writing winning proposals (27 pp)
- **Lab:** Work on group project: decide on usability testing method; start drafting proposal introduction and in-person usability test description or survey

Mon., Feb. 4

- **Focus:** Best practices in online communication design; APA style; parallelism; Proposal writing: handling criteria for evaluation
 - **Read for class**
 - Ch. 5 Designing documents and page layout (18 pp)
 - Ch. 12 Taking technical communication online (21 pp)
 - Handout on Parallelism (in the EDITING section of Blackboard)
 - **Scan**
 - APA materials on Blackboard (will cover in class)
 - 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>
 - Morke, 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; complete drafting usability test instructions or survey
 - **DUE FRI., FEB. 8: Project proposal for website usability study (group) (15%)**

As a group, please email one copy of your proposal to the instructor; be sure to cc all group members. In an appendix to your proposal, be sure to include EITHER

 - 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.

Mon., Feb. 11

- **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.

Mon., Feb. 18 – FAMILY DAY. No class

Mon., Feb. 25

- **Focus:** Strategies for effective writing and editing
- **Read for class**
 - Ch. 4 Writing technical prose (21 pp)
 - Ch. 2 Leading and Misleading the reader (13 pp)
 - All handouts under the EDITING button on Blackboard

Mon. March 4

- **Focus:** Report writing: process, writing the cover letter, introduction, methods, criteria, and findings
- **Read for class**
 - Guidelines for the final report assignment (under ASSIGNMENTS on BB)
 - Ch. 9 Reporting technical information (38 pp)
- **Lab:** Some time will be allowed for group work on your final report

Mon., March 11

- **Focus:** Report writing – writing the conclusions, recommendations, and executive summary; Oral presentations
- **Read for class**
 - Ch. 13 Presenting technical information orally (13 pp)
- **LAB:** Work on PowerPoints for group presentations

Mon., March 18

- **Focus:** Writing fact sheets & technical descriptions; six group presentations on usability study projects (10%)
- **Read for class**
 - Assignment guidelines for the Fact Sheet assignment
 - Check Blackboard for additional resource readings
- **Lab:** topic selection for the Fact Sheet assignment. Discussion of research sources and approaches

Mon., March 25

- **Focus:** Six group presentations on usability study projects (10%)
- **Lab:** Some time to work on Fact Sheet assignment
- **DUE: Final report for website usability study (group) (30%)**

Mon., April 1

- **Focus:** Writing instructions
- **Read for class**
 - Ch. 10 Writing How-to Documents: Instructions, ...and Manuals (22 pp)
- **Lab:** Some time to work on Fact Sheet assignment

Mon., April 8

- **Focus:** Technical editing and document design
- **DUE: Technical description (Fact Sheet). (17%)**
Please bring two hard copies of your Fact Sheet to class

- **In class: Technical editing task. In class. (2 pp) (group) (3%)**

You will work in assigned groups to analyze the fact sheets on a specific topic submitted by other students. You will make recommendations regarding content, writing, structure, layout (including the use of pull quotes). and will present your recommendations in a memo to the instructor. Success on this task may earn you a 2% bonus on your final course grade.

Mon., April 15

- **10% In-class test (closed book).** Multiple choice & short writing and editing tasks