Jonathan Rick
English 394 (1701): Business Writing
Fall 2015
Tuesday, 6:30-9:10 PM
Tawes 0234

Syllabus

Why You're Here

The short version: In today's globalized age, few things can differentiate you better than polished communications skills. And yet, these skills are increasingly scarce. This course will survey the fundamentals of professional communications generally, and business writing specifically, in four parts:

Theme	Topics
1. Branding	Cover letter, resume, LinkedIn profile
2. Everyday Skills	Email, editing, numbers, memos
3. Digital Communications	Blogging, social media, web writing
4. A Manager's Toolbox	Proposals, pitching, PowerPoint

My promise to you: if you read all the materials, attend each class, and never turn in a first draft, you'll set yourself up for success not only in this class, but also in your career.

The long version: The Fundamental Studies Professional Writing requirement strengthens writing skills and prepares students for the range of writing expected of you after graduation. On completion of a Professional Writing course, you'll be able to:

• Analyze a variety of professional rhetorical situations and produce appropriate texts in response
• Understand the stages required to produce competent, professional writing through planning, drafting, revising, and editing
• Identify and implement the appropriate research methods for each writing task
• Practice the ethical use of sources and the conventions of citation appropriate to each genre
• Write for the intended readers of a text, and design or adapt texts to audiences who may differ in their familiarity with the subject matter
• Demonstrate competence in Standard Written English, including grammar, sentence and paragraph structure, coherence, and document design (including the use of visuals), and be able to use this knowledge to revise texts
• Produce cogent arguments that identify arguable issues, reflect the degree of available evidence, and take account of counterarguments

Who I Am
What you need to know: Your professor loves teaching. He enjoys helping people polish their communications skills, and genuinely wants you to excel.

He's a stickler for details. Pay attention to his pet peeves and follow instructions, and you'll do well.

He appreciates being challenged, so never hesitate to disagree. Similarly, pose questions whenever they occur. When in doubt, ask, don't assume. (But, please, check the syllabus first; most of your questions have already been addressed.) He may not have all the answers—and he may even contradict himself occasionally—but he relies on you to keep him honest.

What's nice to know: By dawn, I'm in the pool, swimming for my local Masters team. By daytime, I run a digital communications consultancy, where I help clients use the web to shape and tell their story.

I got my start as a journalist, writing for *Time* magazine in New York. Realizing that I preferred to opine rather than report, I came to Washington and picked up political communications. Upon discovering professional blogging, I shifted to the world of social and digital media.

Required Reading
You need to read one book for this course: *SEND: Why People Email So Badly and How to Do It Better*, by David Shipley and Will Schwalbe. Written by two veteran editors, this short primer offers an excellent overview of email communications. (Such is the book's reputation that it was requested by a secretary of state.) Think of *SEND* (not *Send*) as *The Elements of Style* for the digital era. Other texts are enumerated in the schedule below.

Recommended Reading
1. *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, by Dale Carnegie. Life lessons on how to deal with people, especially in business.

2. *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White. Simply put, the best book about writing.

3. The *New York Times's* standards chief writes the After Deadline blog.

4. The *Wall Street Journal* publishes a similar blog, Style and Substance.

5. Speechwriter Mike Long sends out a weekly e-newsletter that's as entertaining as it is educational.

6. About once a quarter, I send out an e-newsletter that you won't want to miss.

7. I maintain a(n infrequently updated) blog called Sprachgefuhl.

How to Contact Me

The best way to reach me is via email, at jrick@umd.edu. Alternatively, I'm available by phone, at (202) 596-1882. I also encourage you to contact our teaching assistant, Tochi Eni-Kalu, at tenikalu@terpmail.umd.edu, or (301) 346-2075.

I hold office hours immediately after each class, from 9:10-10:10 pm, and by appointment. If I need to reschedule (likely to immediately before class), I'll let everyone know in advance via email.

Our Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading Beforehand	Assignment Due	Assignment Afterward
September 1	Course Introduction and Writing 101	1. Syllabus		
September 8	Writing 101 (Continued)	1. Omit Needless Words 2. Why Is Academic Writing So Bad? 3. All the Best Writers Use This Trick 4. This Video Debunks 10 Popular Misconceptions About English Grammar		
September 15	Branding 101	1. 7 Superb Cover Letters 2. How to Write the Perfect Cover Letter 3. I Read 500 Cover Letters for Entry-Level Media Jobs 4. How to Transform Your Mission Statement From Selfish Into Selfless 5. How to Transform Your Responsibilities Into Accomplishments 6. Show Me the Numbers! 7. Delete These 9 Things From Your Resume 8. 8 Reasons This Is an Excellent Resume for a		Cover letter Resume

Date	Topic	Reading Beforehand	Assignment Due	Assignment Afterward
		Recent College Graduate 9. 19 Reasons Why This Is an Excellent Resume* 10. 8 Things Recruiters Notice About Your Resume at First Glance (and 4 Things That Don't Matter) 11. The Art of the Thank-You Letter		
September 22	Branding 202	1. Make a Good First Impression by Saying Who You Help, Not What Do You 2. What Your Email Says About Your Brand* 3. 5 Tips to Build Your Online Portfolio 4. 10 Reasons Why I Ignored Your Resume 5. How Informality Hurts You* 6. Who's Got the Monkey?*	Cover letter Resume	SWOT analysis
September 29	Conferences	We'll meet one on one for up to 15 minutes to review your progress.	SWOT analysis	
October 6	Email and E-newsletters	1. *SEND: Why People Email So Badly and How to Do It Better* 2. The Single Best Way to Alienate a Recruiter 3. 8 Ways to Send Smarter Emails 4. Saying "No" Is Better Than Saying Nothing 5. How—and How Not—to Introduce Someone via Email 6. Watch These Emails Acted Out in Real Life to See Just How Terrible You Are at Emailing 7. 11 Simple Changes That Would Improve This Email		
October 13	Numbers and Memos	1. You Can't Spell "Numbers" Without "Numb"		Briefing memo

Date	Topic	Reading Beforehand	Assignment Due	Assignment Afterward
October 20	Editing and Blogging	1. What Does a Copy Editor Do? 2. Most People Are Tactical Editors. Here's How to Be a Strategic Editor 3. Should Your Organization Start a Blog? 4. Can the *New York Times* Kill Its Blogs Without Losing the Soul of Blogging in the Process? 5. Why Your Press Release Needs a Blog Post 6. Blog Posts Are the New Press Releases		
October 27	Social Media and Web Writing	1. How to Write Attention-Grabbing Headlines That Convert*	Briefing memo	Headlines Messaging platform
November 3	Proposals, Pitching, and Persuasion	1. How to Avoid Sending Selfish "Just Checking In" Follow-up Emails 2. Mass Email Marketing Is Dead. Try This Modern Prospecting Strategy Instead 3. Have You Seen *Back to the Future*?* 4. How *Not* to Cold Pitch a Journalist 5. 7 Tips to Write a Killer Press Release	Headlines	Blurb
November 10	Conferences	We'll meet one on one for up to 15 minutes to review your progress and your presentation proposal.	Blurb	
November 17	PowerPoint and Public Speaking	1. The Top 10 Secrets of Every Memorable PowerPoint Presentation 2. The Secrets of TED Talks 3. Everything You Need to Know About Presentations, You Can Learn From *Forrest Group* 4. 5 Tips to Become a Presentation Jedi* 5. You Suck at PowerPoint!*	Messaging platform	Request for proposal

Date	Topic	Reading Beforehand	Assignment Due	Assignment Afterward
		6. [How to Make Ugly Slides Beautiful](#) 7. [Slide Makeovers: SlideShare](#)		
November 24	*No class; happy Thanksgiving!*			
December 1	Message Development	1. [Everything I Know About Media Training, I Learned in These 30 Seconds From *Gone Girl*](#) 2. [The 2 Secrets of Media Training](#) 3. [The 6 Principles of Media Training](#)	Request for proposal	
December 8	Presentations		Presentation	

* Most of the readings are short; those marked with an asterisk are longer.

How I Grade
When grading your assignments, I will ask one overriding question: "Have you demonstrated mastery of the given assignment?" I will use the following criteria to arrive at an answer:

Grade	Translation	Description
A	Exemplary	The text demonstrates originality, initiative, and rhetorical skill. The content is mature, thorough, and well-suited for the audience; the style is clear, accurate, and forceful; and the information is well-organized and formatted so that it's accessible and attractive.
B	Effective	The text generally succeeds in meeting its goals without the need for further major revisions.
C	Satisfactory	The text is adequate, but requires some substantial revisions.
D	Unsatisfactory	The text requires extensive revisions. You've encountered big problems.
F	Unacceptable	The text does not have enough information, does something other than is appropriate for a given situation, or contains major and pervasive problems. A failing grade is also assigned to plagiarized work.

I'll convert these letters into numbers, and then your final grade, as follows:

Letter	A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
Number	100	96	93	89	86	83	79	76	73	69	66	63	0
Final Grade	<96.5	<93.5	<89.5	<86.5	<83.5	<79.5	<76.5	<73.5	<69.5	<66.5	<63.5	<59.5	

I'll calculate your final grade as follows:

Assignment	Percentage of Final Grade
1. Cover letter and resume	15%
2. SWOT analysis	10%
3. Briefing memo	15%
4. Messaging platform	15%
5. Request for proposal	15%
6. Presentation (including blurb)	15%
7. Participation (including quizzes and headlines)	15%

While there are no exams, the Professional Writing Program (PWP) requires you to write a total of 25 pages, or about 6,250 words.

I encourage you to revise your work and resubmit it. A successful revision will typically bump you up one grade (for example, from a B+ to an A-), provided you (1) address all my feedback; (2) deliver your revisions by the next class; (3) include the original, graded paper; and (4) write a self-reflection memo that documents your changes. You can revise each assignment once; your presentation is ineligible for revision.

In turn, you will be asked to complete two evaluations of me: one for the University, and one for the PWP.

If You're Absent
Do you know what a "messaging platform" is? Do you know my dos and don'ts for PowerPoint? The only way to be sure is to attend each class. There's only so much you can get from reading; true education blends independent studying with discussion. If you miss a class, you're still responsible for the material we cover.

My Policies and Procedures
1. **Phones**. Please turn your ringer off and resist the (admittedly tempting) urge to finger your phone during class.

2. **Computers**. Studies show that students learn better when they take notes by hand. As a professor at Dartmouth has observed, "The act of typing effectively turns the note-taker into a transcription zombie, while the imperfect recordings of the pencil-pusher reflect and excite a process of integration, creating more textured and effective modes of recall." Accordingly, please don't use a laptop or tablet during class.

3. **Punctuality**. Class starts promptly at 6:30 pm; please arrive on time. (If you're late, make sure to see so I don't make you as absent.)

4. **Plagiarism**. While the rules for citations in business writing differ from those in academic writing, a fundamental reality holds for both: don't steal. Borrowing ideas is perfectly fine, but cite your sources liberally. When in doubt, give credit. Any student guilty of plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council.

5. **Problems**. Questions? Concerns? Suggestions? Please see me sooner rather than later; problems tend to grow as they age. Similarly, if you don't get where I am going or what I want, say so. I care deeply that I do a good job in all endeavors, especially this one.

6. **Food**. While drinking during class is fine, please don't eat; it's distracting to others. You'll have time for a snack during our break.

7. **Formatting**. For each assignment, please bring a hard copy, staple it, and use double-line—but *not* double-sentence—spacing. I don't accept homework that isn't double-spaced, nor do I accept homework via email.

8. **Typos**. Typos sometimes creep in. I get it; this is one reason why professional writers have editors. While a mistake in spelling or grammar isn't the end of the world, it evinces sloppiness that calls into question your professionalism and commitment.

9. **Tutors**. I strongly encourage you to use the university's writing center and/or oral communications center. For free, trained tutors will consult with you about any piece of writing or presentation at any stage of the process. If you use the centers, be sure to let me know.

10. **Deadlines**. Assignments are due—in hard copy, not by email—at the beginning of the given class. If you're absent that day, you're still responsible for handing in the assignment on time. Assignments that are late will be penalized by a full letter (from an A to a B) per day. So, since our class meets on Tuesday night, if you turn in an otherwise A paper on Thursday, you'll earn a C.

11. **Spelling**. Is it "e-mail," or "email"? Is *President* capitalized? When in doubt, consult Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, which is available, free, at m-w.com.

Homework
All assignments, except the resume, must be double-spaced and include both a headline and word count.

Deliverable	Overview	Audience	Goal	Length
Cover letter and resume	You're applying for a job—a real job that is currently open; *you must include the job description*. Write a cover letter and a resume specific to this position.	Typically, the first recipient isn't the hiring manager, but the recruiter.	To secure an interview	Resume: one page, single spaced Cover letter: at least 250 words
SWOT analysis	Write a *thoughtful* analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) related to your business-writing abilities.	Professor Rick	To self-reflect	One page per quadrant
Briefing memo	Write a comprehensive yet concise briefing memo that answers one of the following questions: 1. What do I need to know about the Economic Innovation Group? 2. Who is James Poniewozik, the new TV critic of the *New York Times*? 3. Who is Sundar Pichai, the new CEO of Google? 4. What are the pros and cons of tanning salons? 5. Describe the differences among five dating sites or apps. You are required to use the writer center for this assignment.	Your boss	Often, a manager will ask his staff to get him up to speed on a given subject—to make him smart enough so that he can form a conclusion without having to do the research. In this case, you need to brief your boss for an interview with a reporter.	At least three pages

Deliverable	Overview	Audience	Goal	Length
Messaging platform	Write a messaging platform to promote *SEND*.	You decide—but identify it.	To sell books	One page per channel
Headlines	I'll provide two articles. Write 25 headlines for each one (for a total of 50 headlines).	You decide—but identify it.	To draw clicks	N/A
Request for proposal	Write a request for proposals for a service or good that you need. Examples: a realtor, tutor, website developer, roommate, dog sitter, etc.	Depends on what you're requesting	To draw a handful of *substantive* responses	At least three pages
Blurb	Your final assignment is a PowerPoint-based presentation that you'll deliver to the class. You'll need to do original research; simply making a good argument, sans reference to external sources, is insufficient. Before you begin, I must approve a blurb that outlines your thesis, what you'll cover, what participants can expect to learn, and your credibility on the subject.	Your classmates	To capture the attention of a typical college student If *persuasive*: to convince your classmates to buy what you're selling, to agree with your viewpoint, etc. If *informational*: to equip your classmates with enough knowledge of the given subject to converse intelligently about it	At least 200 words
Presentation				Six to seven minutes—no more than seven minutes and 30 seconds—and at least 10 slides

For each assignment, I'll walk through a detailed template, which is also available on the Enterprise Learning Management System.