

Jonathan Rick  
 English 394 (1801): Business Writing  
 Spring 2018  
 Wednesday, 6:30 – 9:10 PM  
 Tawes 1105

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## 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 five parts:

Theme	Topics
1. Writing 101	Myths and Maxims
2. Professional Branding	Cover Letters, Resumes, and LinkedIn
3. Everyday Skills	Numbers, Email, and Web Writing
4. Framing and Packaging	Visual Aids and Headlines
5. A Manager's Toolbox	Salesmanship, PowerPoint, and Message Development

My promise to you: If you read all the materials, attend each class, and [never, ever 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 Professional Writing Program (PWP) strengthens writing skills and prepares students for the range of writing expected of you after graduation. After completing a PWP 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:* I love teaching. I enjoy helping people polish their communications skills, and genuinely want you to excel.

I'm a stickler for details. Pay attention to my pet peeves and follow instructions, and you'll do well.

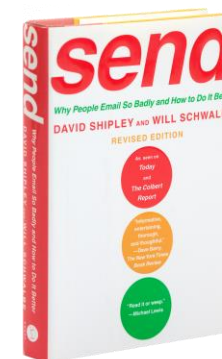
I appreciate being challenged, so never hesitate to disagree. Similarly, pose questions whenever they occur. When in doubt, ask, don't assume.

*What's nice to know:* By dawn, I'm in the pool, swimming for my local Masters team. By daytime, I run a communications consultancy, where I [help people shape and tell their story](#).

I began my career as a journalist, writing for *Time* magazine in New York. Realizing that I preferred to opine rather than report, I moved to Washington and embraced the sister fields of marketing, public relations, and ghostwriting.

## 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. (The edition doesn't matter.) 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 while in office](#).)



## Recommended Reading

1. Ask 10 writers what the most important book about writing is, and at least seven will tell you it's [The Elements of Style](#), by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White.

2. [How to Win Friends and Influence People](#), by Dale Carnegie, brilliantly elucidates the art of dealing with people — especially in business.
3. I write a blog about the use and abuse of language called [Sprachgefühl](#). (You may notice that some of your readings appear here.)
4. Each one of you should be reading a newspaper. If you're not, here's the next best thing: [theSkimm](#). It's an e-newsletter that arrives every Monday through Friday morning and summarizes the top three stories of the day.

### How to Contact Me

The best way to reach me is via email, at [jrick@umd.edu](mailto:jrick@umd.edu). Alternatively, I'm available by phone, at (202) 596-1882. I also strongly encourage you to contact our teaching assistant, Hunter Dortenzo, at [hdortenzo@gmail.com](mailto:hdortenzo@gmail.com) or (443) 859-1507.

I hold office hours immediately after each class, from 9:10 – 10:10 PM, and by appointment.

### How I Grade

In grading your assignments, I'll ask one overarching question: "Have you demonstrated mastery of the given assignment?" I'll use the following criteria to arrive at an answer:

Grade	Description	Explanation
<b>A</b>	Exemplary	The text demonstrates originality, initiative, and rhetorical skill. The content is clear, thorough, and forceful, and the style is well-organized and formatted.
<b>B</b>	Effective	The text generally succeeds in meeting its goals without the need for further major revisions.
<b>C</b>	Satisfactory	The text is adequate, but requires some substantial revisions.
<b>D</b>	Unsatisfactory	The text requires extensive revisions. You've encountered big problems.
<b>F</b>	Unacceptable	The text doesn't have enough information, does something inappropriate for a given situation, or contains major and pervasive problems.

I'll convert these letters into numbers as follows:

<b>Letter</b>	<b>A+</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>B+</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>B-</b>	<b>C+</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>C-</b>	<b>D+</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D-</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Number</b>	100	96	93	89	86	83	79	76	73	69	66	63	0

I'll calculate your final grade as follows:

<b>Letter</b>	<b>A+</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>B+</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>B-</b>	<b>C+</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>C-</b>	<b>D+</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D-</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Number</b>	<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 break down your final grade as follows:

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Portfolio	15
SWOT Analysis	15
Messaging Document	15
Headlines	15
Presentation	15
Pass/Fail Documents (including syllabus feedback, myths and maxims, quizzes, and your required revision)	15
Participation (including subsequent revisions and writing center visits)	10

## Revisions

After your graded work is returned, I encourage you to revise and resubmit it. In fact, you *must* revise at least one assignment.

Except for your presentation, you can revise as many assignments as you like, but each one only once. A successful revision will typically lift your grade by one half letter (for example, from a B+ to an A-, or, in the case of a pass/fail assignment, from an F to a P).

For further details, please read the document, “Revise, Reflect, Resubmit: How to Earn a Better Grade.”

## If You’re Absent

Do you know what a “smart” quotation mark is? Should you write “25 September,” “September 25,” or “September 25<sup>th</sup>”? Should you use the serial comma? The only way to be sure is to attend each class. After all, there’s only so much you can get from reading; true education blends independent studying with discussion.

If you miss a class, it’s your responsibility to get the notes from a classmate.

## My Policies

1. **Email.** I don’t accept homework via email; you need to print everything.
2. **Staples.** Please staple each assignment together.
3. **Deadlines.** Assignments are due — again, in hard copy, never 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 (for example, from an A to a B) every 24 hours.
4. **Punctuality.** Class starts promptly at 6:30 pm. If you’re late, I mark you as absent. (This can be rectified easily: Just see me during the break or after class.)
5. **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. (The exceptions, of course, are if you have a documented disability or we're doing an exercise for which I've asked everyone to bring a computer.)

6. **Food.** While drinking during class is fine, please don't eat; it's distracting to others. You'll have time to snack during our break.
7. **Tutors.** I strongly encourage you to use the university's [writing center](#) and [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, so I can credit you appropriately.
8. **Double Spacing.** Homework that's not double-spaced will earn an automatic F — just as proposals, in the real world, which don't follow instructions are [summarily rejected](#).
9. **Extra Readings.** I'll often send emails with links to interesting and timely articles. I hope you'll not only read this material, but also reply with reflections. (If you don't participate enough in class, this is an opportunity to lift that part of your final grade.)
10. **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.

(Put another way, remember these lines from Aaron Sorkin's TV show, *The Newsroom*: “You can save your students a lot of time. On the first day of class, tell them they know the difference between right and wrong. Do what's right. They don't need a lawyer to tell them their moral absolutes. And whenever you hear someone giving a monologue defending the ethics of their position, you can be pretty sure they know they were wrong.”)

## Homework

Because the format I use for each assignment is so specific, we'll walk through a detailed template for each one during the preceding class.

Note: The templates are for format, *not* content. If your content is as thin as that on a template, you'll be unhappy with your grade.

## Our Schedule

Date	Theme	Topic	Reading Beforehand	Homework Due	Homework Afterward
1/24	Writing 101	Course Introduction and Myths and Maxims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Syllabus*</li> <li>2. <a href="#">How to Email Your Professor*</a></li> </ol>		Syllabus Feedback
1/31	Writing 101	Myths and Maxims (Continued)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">Why You Should Always Read the Fine Print</a></li> <li>2. <a href="#">Sounding Smart Is Not the Same Thing As Being Smart</a></li> <li>3. <a href="#">Omit Needless Words</a></li> </ol>		Myths and Maxims
2/7	Professional Branding	LinkedIn and Cover Letters	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">The Cover Letter Formula That Skyrocketed My Interviews From 0% to 55%</a></li> <li>2. <a href="#">I Read 500 Cover Letters for Entry-Level Media Jobs</a></li> <li>3. <a href="#">Cover Letters Are Hard to Write — but This Template Makes It a Breeze*</a></li> </ol>	Myths and Maxims	
2/14	Professional Branding	Resumes and Job Searching	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">Show Me the Numbers!</a></li> <li>2. <a href="#">Delete These 9 Things From Your Resume</a></li> <li>3. <a href="#">19 Reasons Why This Is an Excellent Resume*</a></li> <li>4. <a href="#">Prepare for a Job Interview the Way a CEO Prepares for a Media Interview</a></li> </ol>		Portfolio
2/21	Everyday	Numbers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">You Can't Spell "Numbers" Without</a></li> </ol>	Portfolio	SWOT

Date	Theme	Topic	Reading Beforehand	Homework Due	Homework Afterward
	Skills		<a href="#"><u>“Numb”</u></a> *		Analysis
2/28		Conferences	We’ll meet one on one for up to 13 minutes to review your progress. Bring all your homework thus far.	SWOT Analysis	
3/7	Everyday Skills	Email	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#"><u>SEND: Why People Email So Badly and How to Do It Better</u></a>*</li> <li>2. <a href="#"><u>Saying “No” Is Better Than Saying Nothing</u></a></li> <li>3. <a href="#"><u>10 Easy Ways to Get Busy People to Respond to Your Emails</u></a></li> <li>4. <a href="#"><u>The Importance of Common Courtesy in Emails</u></a></li> </ol>		
3/14	Everyday Skills and Framing and Packaging	Web Writing and Visual Aids	<p>Bring a laptop.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#"><u>Use This One Simple Trick to Make People Actually Read What You Write</u></a></li> </ol>		Messaging Document
3/21		<i>No class; spring break</i>			
3/28	Framing and Packaging	Headlines	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#"><u>Newspapers Are Still Putting Boring Headlines on Amazing Stories Like the Jamie Gilt Shooting. Why?*</u></a></li> </ol>	Messaging Document	Headlines
4/4		Conferences	We’ll meet one on one for up to 13 minutes to review your progress. Bring all your homework thus far.	Headlines	



Date	Theme	Topic	Reading Beforehand	Homework Due	Homework Afterward
4/11	A Manager's Toolbox	Salesmanship	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">The Right Way — and the Wrong Way — to Introduce Someone via Email*</a></li> <li><a href="#">The Power of Passion</a></li> </ol>		
4/18	A Manager's Toolbox	PowerPoint	<p>Bring a laptop.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Which Is More Important: Linguistic Perfection, or Conversational Engagement?</a></li> <li><a href="#">The Top 10 Secrets of Every Memorable PowerPoint Presentation</a></li> <li><a href="#">The Secrets of TED Talks*</a></li> </ol>		Blurb
4/25	A Manager's Toolbox	PowerPoint (Continued) and Message Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Slide Makeovers: SlideShare</a></li> <li><a href="#">You Suck at PowerPoint!*</a></li> <li><a href="#">Lots of Little Things You Can Do to Make Your Slides More Pleasing to the Eye</a></li> </ol>	Blurb	
5/2	A Manager's Toolbox	Presentations			

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