

Jonathan Rick
 English 394 (1801): Business Writing
 Spring 2020
 Wednesday, 6:30 – 9:10 PM
 Tawes 0234

Here's Everything You Need to Know About English 394: Business Writing

Why You're Here

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

Theme	Topics	Duration
1. Writing 101	Myths and Maxims	01/29 – 02/05
2. Professional Branding	Cover Letters, Résumés, and LinkedIn	02/12 – 02/19
3. Everyday Skills	Numbers, Email, and Web Writing	03/04 – 03/11
4. Framing and Packaging	Visual Aids and Headlines	03/25 – 04/01
5. Presenting	PowerPoint and Public Speaking	04/15 – 04/22
6. Career Advice	Interviewing and Finances	04/29

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 course, 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 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 learn and want you to excel. Equally important: I also want you to have fun.

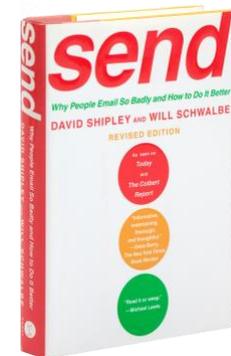
I'm a stickler for details. Pay attention to my pet peeves and follow instructions, and you'll succeed. Don't, and you'll struggle.

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

What's Nice to Know. By dawn, I'm in the pool, swimming with a Masters team. By daytime, I work for myself, doing two things: I [deliver communication workshops](#) (similar to those we do in class), and I [help clients write documents](#) such as résumés, cover letters, [LinkedIn profiles](#), and the like.

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. (Neither the edition nor the format matters.) Written by two veteran editors, this short primer offers an excellent overview of the art and science of email writing. (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 half 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. I strive to respond to all emails within 24 business hours. I also hold office hours immediately after each class, from 9:10 – 10:10 PM, and by appointment.

What's more, I strongly encourage you to contact our teaching assistants, Michael Centrella and Sanjeev Jariwala, at mcentrel@umd.edu and sjariwal@umd.edu. They've taken this course and know how to excel.

How I Grade

I don't grade on a curve. Instead, in assessing your work, 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	Suitable to Show
A	Exemplary	The text demonstrates originality, initiative, and rhetorical skill. The content is clear, thorough, and forceful, and the style is well-organized and formatted.	Your boss
B	Effective	The text generally succeeds in meeting its goals without the need for further major revisions.	Your friends
C	Satisfactory	The text is adequate but requires substantial revisions.	Your mom
D	Unsatisfactory	The text requires extensive revisions. You've encountered big problems.	A tutor

F	Unacceptable	The text doesn't have enough information, does something significant inappropriately, or contains major problems.	No one
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I'll convert these letters into numbers 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

I'll then calculate your final grade as follows:

Letter	A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
Number	≥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:

Assignment	Percentage
1. Branding Portfolio	15
2. SWOT Analysis	15
3. Messaging Document	15
4. Headlines	15
5. Presentation	15

6. Pass/Fail Documents (including syllabus feedback, myths and maxims, quizzes, and blurb)	15
7. Participation (including attendance, revisions, and visits to the writing center)	10

Revisions

After your graded work is returned, I encourage you to revise and resubmit it. For details, please read the document on ELMS titled, “Revisions.”

Absences

Do you know what a “[smart](#)” quotation mark is? Should you write “25 September,” “September 25,” or “September 25th”? Is the [serial comma important](#)? 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.

Indeed, because we meet only once a week, missing one class is like missing *three* classes. Therefore, repeated absences will affect your final grade significantly.

Finally, if you miss a class, it’s your responsibility to make-up any quizzes and to get the notes from a classmate. You should also consult the “Exercises and Handouts” folder on ELMS.

Policies

- Email.** I don’t accept homework via email; you need to print everything. There are several reasons for this policy. For one, it’s easier for me to mark-up 19 papers by hand than it is to do so electronically. For another, I believe it’s a good professional practice for you to prepare and deliver something tangible. Finally, if you’re concerned about the cost of printing, think about the money you’re saving by not having to buy a textbook.
- Staples.** I don’t accept homework that isn’t stapled together.

- 3. Deadlines.** Homework is 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 your work on time. Assignments that are late will be penalized by a full letter (for example, from an "A" to a "B") every 24 hours.

Since I'm on campus only one night a week, if you need to turn in something outside of class time, please use the PWP drop box in Tawes 1220. Equally important: Let me know when you do so, so I know to check.

- 4. Punctuality.** Class starts at 6:30. If you arrive at 6:31, you're marked as absent. My policy is strict for two reasons: (a) Because punctuality is important, and (b) Because once I've started class, it's difficult to simultaneously teach and update my records.

At the same time, this policy has an easy loophole: If you're late, all you need to do is see one of our TAs during the break or after the given class, and he'll change your status to *present*.

- 5. Duration.** I don't end class early; expect to stay until 9:10.

- 6. Participation.** This course is highly interactive; I call on people at random and strive to ensure that everyone participates.

- 7. 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, tablet, or phone to take notes. Instead, reserve your device for our (frequent) group exercises.

- 8. Disabilities.** If you need an academic accommodation, please give me your paperwork from UMD's [Accessibility and Disability Service](#) as soon as possible.

- 9. Inclusion.** It's your right to expect, and my responsibility to foster, a positive learning environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and nondiscrimination. If you experience issues related to diversity and inclusion, or have suggestions about these issues, you're free to contact the department's [diversity liaison](#) and the [Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, and Accessibility Committee](#), respectively.

- 10. Self-Identification.** During our first class, I'll share my name and pronouns and invite you to do the same. Your pronouns, gender, race, sexuality, religion, and dis/ability, among all aspects of your identity, are yours to disclose if and when you want. I'll do my best to address and refer to you according to your own preferences, and I ask you to do the same.
- 11. 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.
- 12. Tutors.** I strongly encourage you to use the university's [writing center](#), [oral communication center](#), and [career 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 do two things: (a) Ask your tutor to email me, so I can credit you appropriately; and (b) Bring the pertinent assignment sheet and any handouts to your meeting; this context will help your tutor help you.
- 13. 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](#).
- 14. 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.)
- 15. Exit Tickets.** At the end of each class, you'll write a short "exit ticket." This is a chance for you to provide feedback in real time. For example: Was anything I said confusing? Did you disagree with something in the readings? Could the structure of the given class be improved? What worked well? These tickets aren't graded and are handwritten. If you'd like a reply, include your name.
- 16. Quizzes.** On occasion, I'll assign a pass/fail pop quiz to make sure you're doing the readings. If you miss a quiz, it's your responsibility to see me, the next time you're in class, to make it up; otherwise, you'll earn an F.
- 17. Cheating.** I'll make this simple: Don't steal. When in doubt, give credit. For specifics, see [UMD's policy on academic integrity](#).

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 displayed on a template, you'll be unhappy with your grade.

If you'd like to see examples of homework from previous semesters that's earned an "A," please email our TAs.

Schedule

Date	Theme	Topics	Reading Beforehand	Homework Due	Homework Afterward
Jan. 29	Writing 101	Course Introduction and Myths and Maxims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Syllabus and Course Documents* 2. How to Email Your Professor* 		Syllabus Feedback
Feb. 5	Writing 101	Myths and Maxims (Continued)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why You Should Always Read the Fine Print 2. If You're Taking a 300-Level English Course, You Should Know These Grammar Rules 3. Never Use an Exclamation Point! (And Other Rhetorical No-Nos) 4. Boost Your Career by Saying What You Mean* 	Syllabus Feedback	Myths and Maxims
Feb. 12	Professional Branding	LinkedIn and Cover Letters	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Cover Letter Formula That Skyrocketed My Interviews From 0% to 55% 2. I Read 500 Cover Letters for Entry-Level Media Jobs* 3. Cover Letters Are Hard to Write — but This Template Makes It a Breeze* 	Myths and Maxims	SWOT Analysis
Feb. 19	Professional Branding	Résumés	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Show Me the Numbers! 	SWOT Analysis	Branding Portfolio

Date	Theme	Topics	Reading Beforehand	Homework Due	Homework Afterward
			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Delete These 9 Things From Your Résumé 17 Reasons Why This Is an Excellent Résumé* The Best Résumés Don't Have a "Skills" Section 		
Feb. 26	Conferences		We'll meet one on one for up to 13 minutes to review your progress. Bring all your homework thus far.		
Mar. 4	Everyday Skills	Numbers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> You Can't Spell "Numbers" Without "Numb"* This Animated Video Shows How Deep the Ocean Really Is How Expert Explainers Put a Mind-Boggling Supercomputer Into Human Terms 	Branding Portfolio	
Mar. 11	Everyday Skills	Email	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> SEND: Why People Email So Badly and How to Do It Better* Why You Should Always Be Extra Polite in Your Emails 		
Mar. 18	No Class (Spring Break)				
Mar. 25	Framing and Packaging	Web Writing and Visual Aids	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Use This One Simple Trick to Make People Actually Read What You Write 		Messaging Document

Date	Theme	Topics	Reading Beforehand	Homework Due	Homework Afterward
Apr. 1	Framing and Packaging	Headlines	1. Newspapers Are Still Putting Boring Headlines on Amazing Stories Like the Jamie Gilt Shooting. Why?*	Messaging Document	Headlines
Apr. 8	Conferences			Headlines	
Apr. 15	Presenting	PowerPoint	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How Apple Presenters Create Slides That Tell Stories in 3 Seconds or Less 2. Slide Makeovers: SlideShare 3. You Suck at PowerPoint!* 4. Lots of Little Things You Can Do to Make Your Slides More Pleasing to the Eye* 		Blurb
Apr. 22	Presenting	PowerPoint (Continued) and Public Speaking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The One Investment Warren Buffett Says Will Change Your Life (And It's Not a Stock) 2. This 1 Tool Is the Key to Improving Your Public Speaking Skills (and It Fits in Your Pocket) 3. Don't Just Memorize Your Next Presentation — Know It Cold* 	Blurb	
Apr. 29	Career Advice	Interviewing and Finances	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare for a Job Interview the Way a CEO Prepares for a Media Interview 2. The Power of Passion 		
May 6	Presenting	Presentations		Presentation	

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