

Jonathan Rick
English 394 (1701): Business Writing
Fall 2021
Tuesday, 6:30 – 9:10 PM
Online

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, across six themes:

Theme	Topics	Duration
1. Writing 101	Myths and Maxims	08/31 - 09/07
2. Branding	Cover Letters, Résumés, and LinkedIn	09/14 - 09/21
3. Everyday Skills	Numbers, Email, and Web Writing	10/05 - 10/12
4. Framing and Packaging	Visual Aids and Headlines	10/19 - 11/02
5. Presenting	PowerPoint and Public Speaking	11/09 - 11/16
6. Career Advice	Job Searching	11/30

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 (P.W.P.) strengthens writing skills and prepares students for the range of writing expected of you after graduation. After completing a P.W.P. 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

1. I love teaching. I enjoy helping people learn and want you to excel. Equally important: I also want you to have fun.
2. 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.
3. I appreciate being challenged, so never hesitate to disagree. Similarly, pose questions whenever they occur. When in doubt, always ask; don't assume.

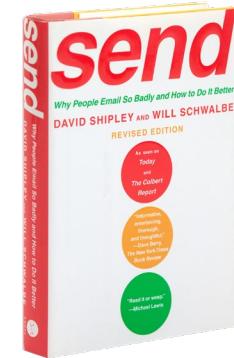
What's Nice to Know

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 people write documents](#) such as résumés, cover letters, [LinkedIn profiles](#), and the like.

Required Readings

Before each class, I expect that you'll do all the readings for that week. I've chosen each text carefully, most are short, and none is boring.

You also 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](#).)



Optional Readings

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. I write a blog about the [use and abuse of language](#). (You may notice that some of your readings appear here.)
3. 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. To sign-up for office hours, [please use this Google Sheet](#).

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

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. SWOT Analysis	15
2. Branding Portfolio	20
3. Messaging Document	20
4. Presentation	20
5. Pass/Fail Documents (including syllabus feedback, myths and maxims, quizzes, blurb, e-portfolio, and peer reviews)	15
6. Participation (including attendance, revisions, exit tickets, and visits to the writing center)	10

Revisions

After you receive back your graded work, I encourage you to revise and resubmit it. Revisions are optional, but they have several specific requirements; for details, see the document on the Enterprise Learning Management System (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 *in real time*. 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, you can make it up in several ways: You can get the notes from a classmate. You can watch a recording. And you can consult the “Slide Decks” and “Recaps” documents on ELMS.

Policies

The Classroom

1. **Zoom.** This entire course will be conducted online, via Zoom. I will email everyone the link, meeting I.D., password, and phone number in a “welcome” email a few days before class starts. (For security, I’m purposely excluding these credentials from the syllabus.)
2. **Synchronicity.** You’ll benefit most by attending each class *synchronously* (that is, at the time I’m teaching). That said, each class will be recorded, and within 24 hours, you should be able to access both an audio-only version and a video via [Panopto](#).
3. **Punctuality.** Class starts at 6:30. If you arrive after 6:30, I will mark you as absent, so that I can shift my full attention to teaching rather than continuing to take roll. At the same time, this policy has an easy loophole: If you’re late, just email me before the given class ends, and I’ll change your status to “present.”
4. **Quizzes.** I’ll sometimes begin class with a one-question, pass/fail quiz. These quick prompts help to ensure that you’re doing the readings. If you miss a quiz, it’s your responsibility to email me to take a *backup* quiz before our next class; otherwise, you’ll earn an F.
5. **Webcams.** The university has deliberately limited the size of our class in order to foster conversation. In a virtual environment, the best way to do that is to use a webcam, so we can see one another. I strongly encourage you to do so.
6. **Participation.** This course is highly interactive; I call on people at random and strive to ensure that everyone participates.
7. **Exit Tickets.** At the end of each class, you’re required to write a quick “exit ticket.” (Each ticket is available under the category, “Exit Tickets,” on ELMS.) 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 are anonymous and are *not* graded — though if you *don’t* do them, your participation grade will suffer. (While I can’t see who wrote what, I can see who completed each ticket.)

Homework

8. **ELMS.** For transparency and organization, I don't accept assignments via email; you need to submit all homework via ELMS.
9. **Deadlines.** Homework is due 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.
10. **Format.** For consistency with your peers and my own ease of use, you must submit all work as Microsoft Word documents. (While Google Docs and Adobe Acrobat are helpful, Microsoft Office is the de facto tool of corporate America.)
11. **File Names.** Please use the following syntax when naming your Word docs:

[Last Name] - [Name of Assignment]

Thus:

Smith - Myths and Maxims

If you don't follow this syntax, I may deduct points from your grade.

Other

12. **Exceptions.** Here's my policy in a nutshell: If you communicate, I can be flexible. For example, if you email me a day before an assignment is due and ask for an extension, I can offer you options. But if you email me an hour before — or, worse, *afterward* — then, out of fairness to your peers, my options are limited.

Put another way: If any of my policies present a problem for you, please let me know as soon as possible, and I will happily accommodate you on a case-by-case basis.

13. **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.

- 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. Cheating.** I'll make this simple: Don't steal. When in doubt, give credit. For specifics, see [U.M.D.'s policy on academic integrity](#).
- 16. Disabilities.** If you need an academic accommodation, please give me your paperwork from U.M.D.'s [Accessibility and Disability Service](#) as soon as possible.
- 17. 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 have concerns related to these issues, please contact the [Committee of Anti-Racism, Accessibility, Respect, Equity, and Social Justice](#).
- 18. 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 preferences, and to ensure that your classmates do the same.

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 me.

Schedule

Date	Theme	Topics	Read These Before Class	Homework Due
Aug. 31	Writing 101	Course Introduction and Myths and Maxims	1. Syllabus and Course Documents* 2. How to Email Your Professor*	
Sep. 7	Writing 101	Myths and Maxims (Continued)	1. Advance Your Career by Saying What You Mean* 2. Why You Should Always Read the Fine Print 3. If You're Taking a 300-Level English Course, You Should Know These Grammar Rules 4. Never Use an Exclamation Point! (And Other Rhetorical No-Nos)	► Syllabus Feedback
Sep. 14	Branding	LinkedIn and Cover Letters	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* 4. The Worst Way to Begin a Cover Letter	► Myths and Maxims
Sep. 21	Branding	Résumés	1. Show Me the Numbers! 2. Delete These 9 Things From Your Résumé 3. 17 Reasons Why This Is an Excellent Résumé* 4. The Best Résumés Don't Have a "Skills" Section	► Syllabus Feedback (Revision) ► SWOT Analysis
Sep. 28	Conferences			► Myths and Maxims (Revision)

Date	Theme	Topics	Read These Before Class	Homework Due
Oct. 5	Everyday Skills	Numbers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You Can't Spell "Numbers" Without "Numb"* 2. This Animated Video Shows How Deep the Ocean Really Is 3. How Expert Explainers Put a Mind-Boggling Supercomputer Into Human Terms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ SWOT Analysis (Revision) ▶ Branding Portfolio
Oct. 12	Everyday Skills	Email	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SEND: Why People Email So Badly and How to Do It Better* 2. Why You Should Always Be Extra Polite in Your Emails 3. 10 Easy Tips to Write an Effective Email 	
Oct. 19	Framing and Packaging	Web Writing and Visual Aids	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use This One Simple Trick to Make People Actually Read What You Write 2. How Your Work Looks Can Be As Important As What It Says 3. A Simple Way to Make Your Boss Like Your Writing More 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Branding Portfolio (Revision)
Oct. 26	Conferences			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Messaging Document
Nov. 2	Framing and Packaging	Headlines	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Newspapers Are Still Putting Boring Headlines on Amazing Stories Like the Jamie Gilt Shooting. Why?* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ E-Portfolio
Nov. 9	Presenting	PowerPoint	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How Apple Presenters Create Slides That Tell Stories in 3 Seconds or Less 2. Lots of Little Things You Can Do to Make Your Slides More Pleasing to the Eye* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Messaging Document (Revision)

Date	Theme	Topics	Read These Before Class	Homework Due
Nov. 16	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* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Presentation Blurb ▶ E-Portfolio (Revision)
Nov. 23	No Class — Enjoy Thanksgiving!			
Nov. 30	Career Advice	Job Searching	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare for a Job Interview the Way a C.E.O. Prepares for a Media Interview 2. Your Story or Your Résumé? How to Answer the Most Common Job Interview Question 3. Why You Should Always Reply to Rejection Letters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Presentation Blurb (Revision)
Dec. 7	Presenting	Presentations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Presentation ▶ Presentation Peer Reviews¹

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

¹ Peer review #1 is due *before* class. Peer review #2 is due *after* class (no later than 10 P.M.).