

English 388: Professional and Technical Writing
Fall 2013 | Monday and Wednesday 12:00 to 1:15 p.m. | Innovation 336

Professor Info:

Dr. Heidi Y. Lawrence
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Course Website:

<http://mason.gmu.edu/~hlawren2/388/>

Office Hours:

T: 10:00 a.m. to 1 p.m.
W: 6:00 to 7:00 p.m.
and by appointment

Course Rationale

This course gives you the opportunity to gain the tools you'll need to leverage communication effectively for a variety of professional situations and audiences. As a rhetorically based approach, the class will focus on providing you with a wide range of analytical skills—including audience analysis, genre analysis, and persuasion—to understand how to best operate in future professional and workplace environments where communication is necessary.

We will approach topics relevant to professional and technical communication by examining and analyzing a wide range of public and professional documents. You will also learn by doing. By the end of the class, you will have practiced communicating a variety of concepts in some of the most important and common technical genres, including proposals, activity reports, instructions, executive summaries, and presentations. Most importantly, you should be able to leverage the skills gained in this class in any number of specialized communications situations you may find yourself in during your career.

Materials

At every class period, you should bring the textbook or other work appropriate for that day's work. In addition, you should **always** plan to have your handbook (*Writing on the Job*), your course notebook, and flash drive or cloud computing available to use during class.

Textbooks:

Writing on the Job: A Quick-Reference Guide to Writing in the Workplace
Authors: John Brereton and Margaret Mansfield
Edition: Updated Edition (1999)
ISBN-10: 0393975118 | ISBN-13: 978-0393975116

Writing that Works: Communicating Effectively on the Job
Authors: Walter Oliu, Charles Brusaw, and Gerald Alred
Edition: 11th Edition (2012)
ISBN-10: 1457611139 | ISBN-13: 978-1457611131

Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins: How to Use Your Own Stories to Communicate with Power and Impact

Author: Annette Simmons
Edition: First (2007)
ISBN-10: 0814409148 | ISBN-13: 978-0814409145

Required Materials:

- A notebook, or other hard-copy means for taking notes when computers are not available
- Access to printing facilities
- A flash drive, cloud computing, or other service that will allow you to transfer files to and from in-class work

Course Objectives

This course is designed to cover a range of situated uses of communication in workplace environments. Our course objectives come directly from these needs. This class will give you the opportunity to develop the following skills that will optimize your communicative capacities in the workplace:

Objective 1: Learn *who* technical and professional communicators are; *how* they use a variety of genres, media, and communications outlets to relay technical and professional messages; and *what* objectives--intended and unintended--they achieve across different audiences.

Objective 2: Produce technical and professional communication that demonstrates an awareness of audience, anticipated genre expectations, and edited professional prose through both individual and collaborative writing experiences.

Objective 3: Reflect on how you will apply the key competencies of professional and technical communication in future workplaces, job search activities, team and collaborative writing projects, and university life.

Course Evaluation and Assignments

To pass the course, you must demonstrate mastery of fundamental professional writing skills, as assessed by assignments typical of those found in the workplace. You will write in a variety of genres and for a variety of audiences. The writing process will include completing drafts, workshops of your colleagues' work, revisions based on feedback, and final papers incorporating comments from previous work.

You are also expected to exhibit professionalism in accordance with the requirements and class policies as detailed in this syllabus.

Assignments are outlined in full on individual assignment sheets; please see those sheets for complete information, including due dates and submission procedures. Grading standards on individual assignments will be set in accordance with the assessment rubrics posted on Scholar for each assignment.

Professionalism: 35%

Analysis Papers, In-class Work, and Quizzes 30%
Attendance and Participation 5%

Technical Communications: 65%

Professional Communication Project 25%
Instructions 5%
Resume and LinkedIn 10%
Proposal 25%

Course Policies

Attendance

To produce effective technical writing in a work environment, you must be present for and attentive to conversations and information shared to ensure the resulting documents are complete, accurate, and meet client requirements. In preparation for that expectation, you must attend every class meeting and arrive on time for the benefit of your own work and that of your colleagues.

The Attendance policies for this class are as follows:

- I will take roll at the beginning of class, and class work will begin promptly at the scheduled start time every day.
- If you are late to or absent from class, grade deductions for late arrivals and absences will occur.
- If you miss more than 2 consecutive classes, you must contact me in person or via email.
- If you are going to miss more classes than allotted during the semester because of illness or work or family emergency, you must make an appointment to talk with me or see me during office hours to discuss your situation further.
- If you miss a class, it is **your responsibility** to get notes and other materials from the day you miss from a colleague in the class. You are welcome to come to office hours to discuss material you have missed in person, but I will not email you with information or materials you have missed for that day.

Penalties for Late Arrival (defined as arriving more than 10 minutes late to class):

- 0-2 late arrivals: no grade deduction
- 3+ late arrivals: 1-point deduction for each late arrival

Penalties for Absences:

- 0-2 absences: no grade deduction
- 3+ absences: 2-point deduction for each absence

Analysis Papers, In-class Work, and Quizzes

Analysis Papers, in-class work, and quizzes are always due by the **date and time** indicated in the assignment instructions. You may also be required to respond to other your colleagues' work, find outside materials or examples, or complete follow-up tasks in class.

Failure to follow the length, time, or any other response requirements to in-class writing will result in a 10% grade deduction for each requirement not met.

IMPORTANT: Analysis Papers, in-class work, quizzes, and other activities completed as a part of regular class participation **cannot be made up**. Analysis Papers, in-class work, quizzes, and participation activities will often be conducted in groups and/or in response to daily class discussions; therefore, this work cannot be made up.

At the end of the semester, your two lowest analysis paper, in-class work, or quiz grades will be dropped.

Assignment Submission and Late Policy

Assignments are to be submitted using the protocol identified on the assignment sheet. I will accept late assignments up to 48 hours after the due date and time, with a grade penalty; after 48 hours, late assignments will only be accepted at the discretion of the professor.

Assignments turned in after the date and time indicated on the assignment sheet will be accepted with the following deductions:

- <24 hours late: 10% grade deduction
- 24-48 hours late: 20% grade deduction
- >48 hours late: professor's discretion

Submission Requirements

Unless otherwise stipulated, the assignments in this course require you to turn in a hard copy in person in class and an electronic copy of the assignment by the designated date and time on the assignment sheet. Some assignments will have other specific formatting or submission requirements, but unless otherwise stipulated, you should follow the requirements below.

Assignments that do not follow any of the format requirements outlined below will receive up to a 10% grade penalty. Assignments not turned in following both Electronic and Hard Copy submission requirements are considered late until all components are properly turned in.

Format. Unless otherwise specified, assignments should follow formatting requirements as follows:

- 11-point, Times New Roman font
- Single spaced
- 1-inch margins
- Name (or Names, if completed in a group), Date, and Assignment name in the top left-hand corner
- Page numbers on all pages

Electronic submission. When turning in assignments electronically, please use the following file naming convention:

- LastNameFirstInitial_AssignmentName.[file extension]
- So, an assignment I turned in would be named: LawrenceH_PolicyMemo.doc
- If you are turning in a group assignment, only turn in one copy of the file, but put all group members names on the document and in the file name, as follows:
LastNameFirstInitial1_LastNameFirstInitial2_Etc._AssignmentName.[file extension]

Hard copy submission. Always plan to turn in a hard copy and electronic copy of all assignments. Hard copies should be legibly printed. Assignments that are more than one page long **must** be stapled.

Absences, Excuses, and Late Work

Absences, late arrivals, or late work are only excused or accepted with an official letter from a doctor, university advisor/official, or employer (direct supervisor or human resources) detailing the dates during which your presence in class was not possible and a rationale for that absence (within reasonable parameters of privacy). The letter or email must be on official stationery or from an organization email account.

If you anticipate that you will have to miss an upcoming class or due date because of a personal, religious, university, or work obligation, then you must contact me as soon as possible to make alternate arrangements to complete your assignment. Please let me know about classes you will have to miss to fulfill religious obligations within the first 2 weeks of the semester.

Technology

Computers, Laptops, and Tablets in Class

In this class, you will use computers to take notes, research, write, and collaborate on tasks with your colleagues. Therefore, it is expected that you will use the computer in the classroom or your personal tablet or laptop during most class meetings.

When you are using computers or related devices in class, you are expected to remain on task and use computers for in-class work only. During class discussions, it will often be required that you turn computer monitors off, power down tablets, or close laptops, so you should always have a backup means of note-taking (such as a hard copy notebook and paper) for those times.

Using any device for email, social media, chatting, playing games, or any other purposes not related to class work is unacceptable and **will result in a participation grade deduction up to 2 points per class meeting.**

Mobile Phones and Other Devices

Mobile phones or similar devices are not to be used during class meetings at all.

They should not be on tables, desks, chairs, or otherwise removed from your bag or person unless explicitly permitted by the professor. Phones should be turned off or set to silent prior to the beginning of class and be kept away and out of sight.

If you have an emergency or other issue for which you may expect a call during our class, please alert me prior to the beginning of class.

Any appearance or use of cell phones or other devices during class will result in a participation grade deduction up to 2 points per class meeting.

E-mail

You will need to use your GMU e-mail account for this course. Information regarding course content will be communicated via email and our Blackboard announcements board, so it is important that you check your GMU email and Blackboard for course communication daily.

Contacting the Instructor

The best way to contact me is email; I will respond to your messages within 24 hours during weekdays and 48 hours on the weekend.

I also encourage you to visit my office during in-person office hours or make an appointment with me at some point during the semester to discuss your writing and any questions you may have about the course or assignments.

NOTE: Remember that emails sent to your professor, colleagues, or team mates should exhibit the guidelines of professionalism discussed in this class. Communication needs to be grammatically correct, include a proper message and salutation, include an appropriate subject line, and demonstrate correct capitalization and spelling.

Failure to follow the business communication guidelines presented in this class will be communicated to you, and continued violation will result in a grade deduction of **1 point per email** that fails to meet business communication standards.

Professionalism and Etiquette

This class is a professional environment. Try to think of this course as practice for how to behave in a workplace. This means being punctual, arriving prepared, taking notes, showing interest in what is being said, and being an active participant in and contributor to in-class work.

Ethical behavior will be maintained at all times. This means acknowledging that all of us are different, yet all opinions deserve to be expressed and respected. This includes, but is not limited to, insensitive and/or inappropriate remarks, statements, or actions regarding race, ethnicity, disability, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and political preference.

These ethical guidelines and standards extend to other class communications, team work conducted outside of class, and other activities relevant to the work of this course.

Honor Code

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. You are expected to know and follow the GMU honor code, which can be found at <http://oai.gmu.edu/honor-code/>.

When using source material, you must give proper credit to the originally published work. Please note that the University defines plagiarism as follows:

- Cutting and pasting from other sources
- Improper and/or lack of proper citations
- Using someone's ideas, thoughts and/or words without citing
- Using poor paraphrasing
- Submitting someone else's work as your own
- Copying word for word without citing
- Submitting the wrong document

All instances of plagiarism, cheating, or other violations of the GMU honor code will be reported to the GMU Office of Academic Integrity.

Please note: Workplace documentation demands some unique requirements where formal, MLA citation is less appropriate, as it would be in academic work. We will discuss these situations at length during the semester. If you have questions about the format or appropriateness of citation in an assignment, consult the assignment sheet, class notes, a classmate, or your professor for further guidance.

Citation

Any time you use material derived from specific sources, whether directly quoted passages, summaries, or paraphrases of facts, opinions, explanations, or ideas, you are ethically obligated to let your reader know who deserves the credit.

We will use a range of citation forms and styles in this course, and you are responsible for properly using the form appropriate to the assignment and situation in question.

Accommodations

If you are a student with special needs or accommodations, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you require special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, see me during my office hours or provide me with information about your necessary accommodations from the Office of Disability Services: <http://ods.gmu.edu>.