

Business & Professional Writing

COMM 310 | Spring 2016 | Mon./Wed. 10:00 – 11:50 | Curtis Newbold, PhD

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What is this course?

Business and professional writing, of course. The title of the class identifies an emphasis on three things: business, professionalism, and writing. In a communication program, we situate these three topics within the expanded realm of communication. From this perspective, we might view this course somewhat more broadly, as a “Business Communication” seminar, where each of us—students and instructor—engage in conversations about the role of writing in business communication situations, including via the web, social media, formal and informal presentations, email, memos, reports, and so forth. We frame these communications with an emphasis on writing style and structure in a business environment. Then, we focus on professionalism through clarity, conformity, audience adaptation, and information design.

By the end of the semester, you should expect to be more confident in the following skills:

- Adapting to audience needs and characteristics through rhetorical and situational analysis;
- Expressing ideas effectively in writing through brevity, clarity, simplicity, and humanity;
- Designing documents to be functional, usable, approachable, and worthwhile;
- Presenting ideas to be persuasive;
- Analyzing ethical responsibility in business communication through awareness of gendered language, citation and copyright guidelines, multicultural perspectives, and related topics;
- Creating a diverse range of professional communication documents, including emails, reports, pitches, presentations, style guides, letters, résumés, memos, and so forth; and
- Collaborating to solve problems through teamwork, research, and project management.

Why should I take this course?

Because it's required to graduate. **And** because it's one of the most essential and frequently used skillsets you'll use at just about any job. On nearly any job skills list where employers name their most valued skill—regardless of discipline—communication almost always ranks #1. Your ability to adapt to an audience, write with pith and persuasion, pitch new ideas in front of a crowd, propose changes, and instruct others will largely define your success as a job candidate and as an employee. If you can master the skills learned in this course, you'll be well on your way to a life of success.

What will I need to succeed?

Textbook: *Essentials of Business Communication, 10th ed.*, by Mary Ellen Guffey and Dana Loewy
Notebook and pen

Laptop

Awesome attitude

Is attendance required?

Yes. While an absence here or there due to illness or personal circumstances is anticipated, you are expected to be in class 90% of the time. Any non-excused classes beyond three absences will reduce your grade by 3% per absence. **Note:** An illness, even with a doctor's note, is not an

“excused” absence. Excused absences are only college-related activities (such as sports, clubs, or other engagements that force you to miss class). Please plan accordingly and reserve your “sick days” for days when you really are sick or have a personal emergency. Sleeping in class, doing other course homework, watching March Madness on your cell phone (unless it’s a **really** good game...[sarcasm]), or being asked to leave for disruption will be counted as an absence.

Assessment and Grade Breakdown

Your grade will be based on the professional quality of your assignments and your attendance and participation in class. Some of your work will be completed individually while other assignments will be completed collaboratively. Everyone in collaborative groups will share the same grade unless documented circumstances indicate that a different arrangement is necessary. It is your responsibility to document any problems within your collaborative groups and to discuss these problems with me should they arise.

Every assignment will include an assignment description and scoring standard and/or rubric. It is up to you closely follow these documents. Your grade will depend on your ability to follow the guidelines given and to produce professional-level work in those areas.

For each assignment, I will holistically assess your work for professionalism in all areas, including writing style and structure (which includes grammar, mechanics, and spelling), information design, and audience adaptation. There are 1000 points total in the course. Your overall grade will be taken from the percentage of total points earned during the semester. The following is a grade breakdown by points earned:

A	925 – 1000	B+	865 – 899	C+	765 – 799	D+	665 – 699	F	< 600
A-	900 – 924	B	835 – 864	C	735 – 764	D	635 – 664		
		B-	800 – 834	C-	700 – 734	D-	600 – 634		

Assignments

Below is an overview of assignments likely to be completed over the course of the semester. Please note that, while I will try to keep to the assignments and dates outlined in the syllabus, there may be more or fewer assignments than what is listed below.

The Self-reflection

Before we really jump into it all, you’ll want to understand yourself as a writer and as a professional. You’ll be tasked with collecting several documents of your own writing (emails, letters, reports, etc.) and bringing them to class. Your peers will anonymously read your documents and evaluate them based on several rhetorical devices: style, tone, personality, wordiness, redundancy, clarity, organization, design, and so forth. After reviewing the survey data of your writing, you’ll reflect, in a short essay, on where you believe you are as a professional writer.

The Job Application Project

We’ll begin the semester with a project you’re likely familiar with: applying for a job or internship. To give you a variety of experience in résumé creation, you’ll develop either a

functional or chronological résumé for one job, or a creative résumé for another job. You'll also create a letterhead and business card that matches both résumés, creating a visual identity for your personal brand. On the letterhead, you'll write an awesome cover letter tailored specifically to that killer job you really want.

The Adjustment Email

Next, we'll fine-tune your customer-focused business writing skills in the most common form of communication today: the email. Sounds simple, but you'll work on mastering the techniques of subject lines (so that people will actually read your message); document design and highlighting guidelines; organizational patterns; professional diction; courtesy; biased-free language; precise, vigorous words; and flabby-free phrasing.

The Bad News Letter

Now to the internal communication. Once you have a strong grasp of writing style and structure, you'll be prepared to rhetorically frame a message—that your audience will not be happy about—in a way that the reader will understand the decision behind the bad news and be less likely to attack you personally for it. It's all about organization and setting up appropriate, well positioned buffers, cushions, compliments, facts, and reasons why your audience should agree with you.

The White Paper

At this point, you're going to be a pretty darn good writer. So you have a new task: create a fully researched document that has a corporate/organizational intent to persuade. A white paper is an informative document that encourages people to act or buy but the paper isn't marketing or sales heavy. You see these kinds of documents on all kinds of websites, encouraging people to apply for loans, join a movement, tailor their golf club, or whatever else. You'll do the secondary research, insert images and graphics, cite your sources, and write strategically.

The Recommendation Report

Next you'll research an organization and a potential or current communication issue they are having. Organizations consistently have trouble communicating particular ideas to specific people and you'll take on the task of recognizing where the issues lie and how to solve them. Using primary research—from interviews, questionnaires, surveys, observations, and usability tests—you'll determine how best to solve the client's problem and write a detailed recommendation report.

The Field Map & Presentation

Then, there's the presentation. Don't scoff—you'll be doing these your entire life, so now's the time to become awesome at them. You'll focus on professional presentation and public speaking tactics including attention-grabbers, organizational strategies, visual aids and slide design, movement and vocal intonations, storytelling, and all that good stuff. The topic? Mapping out a field of work, then pitching an occupation to a group who is undecided about their career path.

The Business Communication Booklet

Finally, you'll have the chance to put your creativity and content knowledge to work in a booklet that you design and write. Consider yourself an author who has been tasked by a publisher to develop a "Business Communication Best Practices" pocket manual for college students. Be strategic about what you include and leave out and design the document to be professional and awesome. Plan on including images, diagrams, charts, colors, highlighting techniques, appropriate tone, binding, and whatever else you would

expect in a fully professional document like this. Blend that perfect mix of creativity and professionalism.

The Punctuation Spotlight

The English language has 14 punctuation marks (15 if you include the asterisk). And there are at least 70 basic rules to follow, not to mention all the weird exceptions and style guide adaptations. Each class period, we'll learn about a punctuation mark and its rule(s); you'll get to be the one to teach it to us all. It's more exciting than you think.

Saving Work

In order to give specific feedback on written assignments, I generally grade electronically using the "comments" function in Microsoft Word. Because of this, I ask that you save all written documents in Microsoft Word, saved as **projectname_yourlastname.doc** (for example: jobapplication_newbold.doc).

Be sure to back up all of your work. If an assignment is late because a computer crashed or you lost what you were working on, you are responsible to either redo it or locate your lost work, but still get it turned in on time. No exceptions.

Canvas

Canvas will be an integral part of this course. All assignment submissions and grading will be done in Canvas. Also, all assignment descriptions and other resources we access in class will be uploaded to the "Files" section of the course.

Attendance & Participation

Please read policy on page 1 of the syllabus under "is attendance required?"

Late Work

All assignments are due on the due date; late assignments will be **docked 10% per late day**. Weekends count too. *For example, if an assignment is due on Thursday and you turn it in on Monday, it is four days late. This equals 40%, so the highest you could possibly make on an assignment worth 200 points would be a 120, assuming that the assignment was otherwise perfect.* Extensions (in rare circumstances) must be approved by me **PRIOR** to the due date.

Academic Integrity

I do not tolerate academic dishonesty. Any student who plagiarizes in any form will fail the course. No lying, cheating, stealing, or borrowing others' work and claiming it as your own. If ever in doubt, don't. Or, at least, ask me first.

Other General Policies

Questions concerning a grade: If you have any questions concerning a grade, I will be happy to talk to you about it **24 hours** after the grade has been received and you have read through all the comments, and no later than **one week** after receiving the grade. After one week, there will be no discussion.

Gradebook: I will keep Canvas updated with your grades. It is up to you to keep up with your grades and where you are at in the course. I do my best to be careful, but if I ever make a mistake, please don't hesitate to let me know so that I can research it and correct it.

Rounding grades: At the end of the semester, I round grades to the nearest percentage. If it is a .5 or higher, I round up. If you have, for example, an 89.5, it will round up to a 90%, or A-. But, if it is 89.4, it will remain a B+.

My help: I know that it can sometimes be difficult to know what professors expect with written assignments. I will be more than happy to answer questions about anything covered in class, including specific questions about drafts of your assignments; however, please **do not ask me to proofread several versions** of an assignment without meeting with me. If you are concerned about following guidelines or would like help, it is usually best to meet in person and will save us both time and energy.

Class Proceedings: While we will cover the most pertinent information in class, it is important that you keep up with assigned readings on your own. Rest assured that you will not do well on the tests or assignments unless you **READ** the chapters. I will frequently post information throughout the semester to clarify chapters and further elaborate. It is important that you read these posts. If after reading the chapter you still need help clearing up any chapter information, just let me know. I will be happy to explain things further.

Email Responses: Because email seems to be a preferred method of communication for both students and professors, I will do my best respond within 24 hours (usually sooner) to your emails. For example, if you send me an email at 6:00pm on a Tuesday, do not expect a response that same evening. If I happen to be online, I will try to respond, but more than likely, you will not hear back until the next day. Also, like many workers in the field, I don't typically work in the evenings or much on the weekends, so my response time may be slower if I receive, for example, an email late Saturday night.

Non-Productive and Disruptive Behavior: All students and instructors have the right to enjoy a productive learning environment. If a student infringes on others' rights by being disrespectful or engaging in any non-productive or disruptive behavior, he/she will be removed from this class. No discriminatory behavior directed toward a person's race, religion, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, or other will be tolerated.

Cell Phones and Other Personal Items: Noise-making devices such as cell phones, pagers, laptops, MP3 players, and other portable electronic devices can be very disruptive and annoying. Please be conscious of the learning environment for those around you. Do not answer cell phones, call, or text message during class. If you are expecting an emergency phone call during class, please inform me before class begins and turn your phone to vibrate.

Students with Disabilities

Westminster College is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere that reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability that may impact access to this course, please contact the Disability Services (DS), specifically Ginny DeWitt, *Disability Services Coordinator* located in the START Center (801-832-2280). Reasonable academic accommodations are reviewed for all students who have qualified, documented disabilities. Services are coordinated with the student and instructor by the DS Coordinator. Westminster College provides reasonable access to courses but this does not necessarily equate to ensuring your success in any course. If you need assistance or if you feel you have been unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of disability, you may seek resolution through established grievance policy and procedures by contacting the ADA Coordinator (new contact information coming soon) and/or the Office of the General Counsel at 801-832-2565.