

Jonathan Rick
English 394 (1801): Business Writing
Fall 2016
Tuesdays, 6:30-9:10 PM
Tawes 1313

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. Branding	Cover letter, resume, LinkedIn profile, elevator pitch
3. Everyday Skills	Email, e-newsletters, numbers, memos
4. Digital Communications	Social media, web writing, headlines
5. A Manager's Toolbox	Proposals, pitching, PowerPoint

My promise to you: if you read all the materials, attend each class, and [never 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 Fundamental Studies Professional Writing requirement strengthens writing skills and prepares students for the range of writing expected of you after graduation. On completion of a Professional Writing 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.

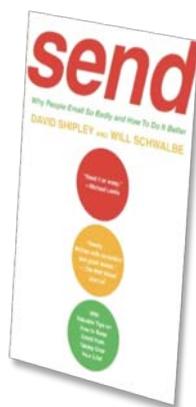
I appreciate being challenged, so never hesitate to disagree. Similarly, pose questions whenever they occur. When in doubt, ask, don't assume. (But, please, check the syllabus first; most of your questions have likely been addressed here.)

What's nice to know: By dawn, I'm in the pool, swimming for my local Masters team. By daytime, I run a [digital communications consultancy](#), where I help people use the web to 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 came to Washington and embraced marketing and public relations.

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. The most important book you can read about writing is [*The Elements of Style*](#), by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White.
2. [*How to Win Friends and Influence People*](#), by Dale Carnegie, elucidates the art of dealing with people, especially in business.

3. I write a blog about the use and abuse of language called [Sprachgefühl](#).

How to Contact Me

The best way to reach me is via email, at jrick@umd.edu. Alternatively, I'm available by phone, at (202) 596-1882. I also encourage you to contact our teaching assistant, Lindi Harron, at lharron@terpmail.umd.edu or (301) 385-9936.

I hold office hours immediately after each class, from 9:10-10:10 pm, and by appointment. If I need to reschedule office hours (likely to immediately *before* class), I'll let everyone know in advance via email.

Our Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading Beforehand	Assignment Due	Assignment Afterward
August 30	Course Introduction and Writing 101			Syllabus Feedback
September 6	Writing 101 (Continued)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How to Email Your Professor 2. Omit Needless Words 3. Why Is Academic Writing So Bad? 4. Sounding Smart Is Not the Same Thing As Being Smart 5. This Video Debunks 10 Popular Misconceptions About English Grammar 		Myths and Maxims
September 13	Branding 101	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 7 Superb Cover Letters 2. I Read 500 Cover Letters for Entry-Level Media Jobs 	Myths and Maxims	Cover Letter Resume

Date	Topic	Reading Beforehand	Assignment Due	Assignment Afterward
		3. Cover Letters Are Hard to Write—but This Template Makes It a Breeze 4. Show Me the Numbers! 5. Delete These 9 Things From Your Resume 6. 8 Reasons This Is an Excellent Resume for a Recent College Graduate 7. 19 Reasons Why This Is an Excellent Resume* 8. 8 Things Recruiters Notice About Your Resume at First Glance (and 4 Things That Don't Matter)		
September 20	Branding 202	1. Make a Good First Impression by Saying Who You Help, Not What Do You 2. How to Transform Your Mission Statement From Selfish Into Selfless 3. How to Fix Your Super Boring Elevator Pitch 4. What Your Email Says About Your Brand* 5. 5 Tips to Build Your Online Portfolio 6. 10 Reasons Why You Didn't Get the Job	Cover Letter Resume	SWOT Analysis
September 27	Conferences	We'll meet one on one for up to 15 minutes to review your progress.	SWOT Analysis	
October 4	Numbers and Memos	1. You Can't Spell “Numbers” Without “Numb” 2. How to Write Talking Points		Briefing Memo

Date	Topic	Reading Beforehand	Assignment Due	Assignment Afterward
October 11	Email and E-newsletters	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>SEND: Why People Email So Badly and How to Do It Better*</i> 2. <u>Saying “No” Is Better Than Saying Nothing</u> 3. <u>How—and How Not—to Introduce Someone via Email</u> 4. <u>8 Ways to Send Smarter Emails</u> 5. <u>It’s Time to Stop Writing “I Hope You’re Well” in Emails</u> 	Briefing Memo	
October 18	Headlines	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Newspapers Are Still Putting Boring Headlines on Amazing Stories Like the Jamie Gilt Shooting. Why?</u> 2. <u>How to Write Attention-Grabbing Headlines That Convert*</u> 		Messaging Platform
October 25	Social Media and Web Writing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Web Writing vs. Copywriting: What’s the Difference?</u> 	Messaging Platform	Headlines
November 1	Proposals and Pitching	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>How to Avoid Sending Selfish “Just Checking In” Follow-up Emails</u> 2. <u>Mass Email Marketing Is Dead. Try This Modern Prospecting Strategy Instead*</u> 	Headlines	Request for Proposal
November 8	Conferences	We'll meet one on one for up to 15 minutes to review your progress.	Request for Proposal	
November 15	PowerPoint and Public Speaking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>The Top 10 Secrets of Every Memorable PowerPoint Presentation</u> 2. <u>The Secrets of TED Talks*</u> 		Blurb

Date	Topic	Reading Beforehand	Assignment Due	Assignment Afterward
		3. Everything You Need to Know About Presentations, You Can Learn From Forrest Group 4. You Suck at PowerPoint!* 5. How to Make Ugly Slides Beautiful 6. Slide Makeovers: SlideShare		
November 22	No class; happy Thanksgiving		Blurb	
November 29	Media Training	1. Everything I Know About Media Training, I Learned in These 30 Seconds From Gone Girl 2. Why Everyone Needs Media Training Before Talking With a Reporter 3. Stories, Statistics, and Sound Bites*		
December 6	Presentations		Presentation	

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

How I Grade

When grading your assignments, I will ask one overriding question: “Have you demonstrated mastery of the given assignment?” I will use the following criteria to arrive at an answer:

Grade	Translation	Description

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.
B	Effective	The text generally succeeds in meeting its goals without the need for further major revisions.
C	Satisfactory	The text is adequate, but requires some substantial revisions.
D	Unsatisfactory	The text requires extensive revisions. You've encountered big problems.
F	Unacceptable	The text does not have enough information, does something other than is appropriate for a given situation, or contains major and pervasive problems. A failing grade is also assigned to plagiarized work.

I'll convert these letters into numbers, and then your final grade, 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
Final Grade	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 calculate your final grade as follows:

Assignment	Percentage of Final Grade
1. Cover letter and resume	15%
2. SWOT analysis	10%
3. Briefing memo	15%
4. Messaging platform	15%

5. Request for proposal	15%
6. Presentation (including blurb)	15%
7. Participation (including attendance, myths and maxims, and headlines)	15%

While there are no exams, the Professional Writing Program (PWP) requires you to write a total of 25 pages, or about 6,250 words.

Revisions

I encourage you to revise your work and resubmit it. You can revise each assignment once; your presentation is ineligible for revision. A successful revision will typically bump you up one grade (for example, from a B+ to an A-), provided you

- address all my feedback
- deliver your revisions by the next class after I return the assignment to the whole class
- include the original, graded paper
- write a thoughtful memo to me that reflects on the lessons you learned and identifies patterns

Note: While I'll read every line of what you write, I won't circle every mistake. That's because I'm not your editor; I'm your teacher. My goal is get you to think for yourself. So, just because I don't note a typo doesn't mean you're absolved of responsibility to correct it.

If You're Absent

Do you know what a “messaging platform” is? What are my “do’s” and “don’t’s for PowerPoint? Do you write “25 September,” “September 25,” or “September 25th”? The only way to be sure is to attend each class. There’s only so much you can get from reading; true education blends independent studying with discussion. If you miss a class, you’re still responsible for the material we cover.

My Policies and Procedures

1. **Phones.** Please turn your ringer off and resist the (admittedly tempting) urge to finger your phone during class. The less you’re distracted, the more you’ll learn.

2. **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, unless you have a documented disability, please don’t use a laptop or tablet during class.
3. **Punctuality.** Class starts promptly at 6:30 pm. If you’re late, I mark you as absent. (This can be easily corrected if you see me during the break or after class.)
4. **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.
5. **Problems.** Questions? Concerns? Suggestions? Please see me sooner rather than later; problems tend to grow as they age. Similarly, if you don’t get where I am going or what I want, say so. I care deeply that I do a good job in all endeavors, especially this one.
6. **Food.** While drinking during class is fine, please don’t eat; it’s distracting to others. You’ll have time for a snack during our break.
7. **Bathroom.** If you need to use the bathroom, please do so; there’s no need to ask.
8. **Formatting.** For each assignment, please bring a paper copy and staple it. I don’t accept homework via email.
9. **Formatting (Part 2).** Please use the font, Times New Roman, in size 12, and please use double-line—but [not double-sentence](#)—spacing. Homework that isn’t double-spaced will receive an F.

10. Typos. While a mistake in spelling or grammar isn't the end of the world, it evinces sloppiness that calls into question your professionalism and commitment.

11. Tutors. I strongly encourage you to use the university's [writing center](#) and/or [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.

12. Deadlines. Assignments are due—in hard copy, not 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 (from an A to a B) per day.

13. Spelling. Is it “e-mail,” or “email”? Is *President* capitalized? When in doubt, consult Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, which is available, free, at m-w.com.

Homework

All assignments, except your resume, must be double-spaced and include both a headline and word count.

Deliverable	Overview	Audience	Goal	Length
Syllabus feedback	Review the syllabus and list of pet peeves, and email our TA a <i>specific</i> question or comment about these documents.	Professor Rick	To demonstrate that you understand the course guidelines	N/A
Myths-and-maxims revisions	Go through the papers you've written thus far in college, and identify five particularly weak sentences or paragraphs. Revise them in accordance with the myths and maxims we've discussed.	Professor Rick	To demonstrate mastery of the myths and maxims	At least one page
Cover letter and resume	You're applying for a job—a real job that is currently open; you must include the job description. Write a	Typically, the first recipient isn't the	To secure an interview	Resume: one page, single spaced

Deliverable	Overview	Audience	Goal	Length
	cover letter and a resume specific to this position. Your first page should be a cover page that consists of a heading and headline.	hiring manager, but the recruiter.		Cover letter: at least 250 words
SWOT analysis	Write a <i>thoughtful</i> analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) related to your business-writing abilities.	Professor Rick	To self-reflect	At least four pages
Briefing memo	<p>Often, a manager will ask his staff to get him up to speed on a given subject—to make him smart enough so that he can form conclusions without having to conduct research. In this case, you need to brief your boss for an interview with a reporter.</p> <p>Write a comprehensive yet concise briefing memo that addresses one of the following issues:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What should I know about Squarespace? 2. Who is Elizabeth Beisel? 3. Get me to up speed about the TV show, <i>Silicon Valley</i>. <p>You are required to use the writing center for this assignment; your tutor must email me confirmation.</p>	Your boss (in this case, me)	To synthesize information from a variety of sources (make sure to use your own words and make it clear you've done research)	At least three pages

Deliverable	Overview	Audience	Goal	Length
Messaging platform	Write a messaging platform to promote <i>SEND</i> .	College students	To sell books	At least three pages
Headlines	I'll provide two articles. Write 25 headlines for each one (for a total of 50 headlines).	You decide—but identify it.	To draw clicks (credibly)	N/A
Request for proposal	Write a request for proposals for a service or good that you need. Examples: a realtor, tutor, website developer, roommate, dog sitter, etc.	Depends on what you're requesting	To draw a handful of <i>substantive</i> responses	At least three pages
Blurb	<p>Your final assignment is a PowerPoint-based presentation that you'll deliver to the class. You'll need to do original research; merely making a good argument or discussing your personal experience—without reference to external sources—is insufficient.</p> <p>Before you begin, I must approve a blurb that outlines your thesis, what you'll cover, what participants can expect to learn, and your credibility on the subject.</p> <p>You are required to rehearse your presentation with another student from class.</p>	Your classmates	<p>To capture the attention of a typical college student</p> <p>If <i>persuasive</i>: to convince your classmates to buy what you're selling, to agree with your viewpoint, etc.</p> <p>If <i>informational</i>: to equip your classmates with enough knowledge of the given subject to converse intelligently about it</p>	At least 200 words

Deliverable	Overview	Audience	Goal	Length
Presentation	Ibid.	Ibid.	Ibid.	Six to seven minutes, and at least 10 slides

For each assignment, I'll walk through a detailed template, which is also available on the [Enterprise Learning Management System](#).