

Jonathan Rick  
 English 394 (1801): Business Writing  
 Spring 2017  
 Wednesdays, 6:30-9:10 PM  
 Tawes 1105

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## 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. Bad Writing vs. Good Writing	Myths and maxims
2. Personal Branding	Cover letter, resume, LinkedIn, elevator pitch
3. Everyday Skills	Email, numbers, memos
4. Web Writing	Headlines, headings
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 Professional Writing Program (PWP) 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 sell their story.

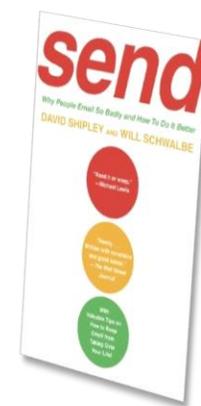
I began my career as a journalist, writing for *Time* magazine in New York. Realizing that I preferred to opine rather than report, I moved to Washington and embraced the sister fields of marketing, public relations, and ghostwriting.

### 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. Ask 10 writers what the most important book about writing is, and at least seven 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 the readings appear here.)
4. Each one of you should be reading a daily 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](mailto:jrick@umd.edu). Alternatively, I'm available by phone, at (202) 596-1882. I also strongly encourage you to contact our teaching assistant, Maria Suplee, at [msuplee24@gmail.com](mailto:msuplee24@gmail.com), or (301) 758-8583.

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
January 25	Course Introduction and Writing 101			Syllabus Feedback
February 1	Writing 101 (Continued)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">How to Email Your Professor*</a></li> <li>2. <a href="#">Why I'm a Stickler for Templates</a></li> <li>3. <a href="#">Omit Needless Words</a></li> <li>4. <a href="#">Sounding Smart Is Not the Same Thing As Being Smart</a></li> </ol>		Myths and Maxims
February 8	Branding 101	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">Show Me the Numbers!</a></li> <li>2. <a href="#">The Cover Letter Formula That Skyrocketed My Interviews From 0% to 55%</a></li> </ol>	Myths and Maxims	Branding Portfolio

Date	Topic	Reading Beforehand	Assignment Due	Assignment Afterward
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. <a href="#">I Read 500 Cover Letters for Entry-Level Media Jobs</a></li> <li>4. <a href="#">Cover Letters Are Hard to Write — but This Template Makes It a Breeze</a></li> <li>5. <a href="#">Delete These 9 Things From Your Resume</a></li> <li>6. <a href="#">8 Reasons This Is an Excellent Resume for a Recent College Graduate</a></li> <li>7. <a href="#">19 Reasons Why This Is an Excellent Resume*</a></li> </ol>		
February 15	Branding 202	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">What Your Email Says About Your Brand*</a></li> <li>2. <a href="#">10 Reasons Why You Didn't Get the Job</a></li> </ol>	Branding Portfolio	SWOT Analysis
February 22	Conferences	We'll meet one on one for up to 14 minutes to review your progress.	SWOT Analysis	
March 1	Numbers and Memos	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">How to Write Talking Points</a></li> </ol>		Briefing Memo
March 8	Email	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">Saying “No” Is Better Than Saying Nothing</a></li> <li>2. <a href="#">It's Time to Stop Writing “I Hope You're Well” in Emails</a></li> <li>3. <a href="#">SEND: Why People Email So Badly and How to Do It Better*</a></li> </ol>	Briefing Memo	Messaging Platform
March 15	Headlines	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">Newspapers Are Still Putting Boring Headlines on Amazing Stories Like the Jamie Gilt Shooting. Why?</a></li> </ol>	Messaging Platform	
March 22	<i>No class; enjoy spring break</i>			

Date	Topic	Reading Beforehand	Assignment Due	Assignment Afterward
March 29	Headlines (Continued)	1. <a href="#">How to Write Attention-Grabbing Headlines That Convert</a> *		Headlines
April 5	Proposals and Pitching	1. <a href="#">How — and How Not — to Introduce Someone via Email</a>	Headlines	Request for Proposal
April 12	Conferences	We'll meet one on one for up to 14 minutes to review your progress.	Request for Proposal	
April 19	Message Development			
April 26	PowerPoint and Public Speaking	1. <a href="#">Which Is More Important: Linguistic Perfection, or Conversational Engagement?</a> 2. <a href="#">The Top 10 Secrets of Every Memorable PowerPoint Presentation</a> 3. <a href="#">The Secrets of TED Talks</a> * 4. <a href="#">You Suck at PowerPoint!</a> * 5. <a href="#">Slide Makeovers: SlideShare</a>		Blurb
May 3	TBD			
May 10	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. Branding portfolio	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 PWP requires you to write a total of 25 pages, or about 6,250 words.

### Revisions

Want to know the difference between good writing and bad writing? Easy: good writers revise. And then revise again.

After your graded work is returned, I encourage you to revise and resubmit it. You can revise each assignment once; your presentation is ineligible. 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 class after I return the assignment to everyone
- write a thoughtful memo, to me, which identifies problematic patterns in your assignment and proposes solutions
- staple the pages in this order: your self-reflection memo, your revised assignment, your original assignment

Note: your memo should be less a list of mistakes and more a reflection on lessons learned.

### **If You're Absent**

Do you know what a “messaging platform” is? What are my “do”s and “don’t”s for PowerPoint? Is it “25 September,” “September 25,” or “September 25<sup>th</sup>”? 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 rectified easily: just 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.

(Put another way, remember these lines from Aaron Sorkin’s TV show, *The Newsroom*: “You can save your students a lot of time. On the first day of class, tell them they know the difference between right and wrong. Do what’s right. They don’t need a lawyer to tell them their moral absolutes. And whenever you hear someone giving a monologue defending the ethics of their position, you can be pretty sure they know they were wrong.”)

- 5. Problems.** Questions? Concerns? Suggestions? See me sooner rather than later; problems tend to grow as they age.
- 6. 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.

7. **Bathroom.** If you need to use the bathroom, feel free to do so; there's no need to ask.
8. **Formatting.** For each assignment, please bring a paper copy and staple it. I do not 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. **Formatting (Part 3).** Every assignment — except your cover letter, resume, and memos — must use the following six-part heading in the top left:

[Your Name] Professor Jonathan Rick English 394 (1801): Business Writing [Which Assignment This Is] December 12, 2015
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Headline

11. **Formatting (Part 4).** Every assignment should include a word count at the bottom.
12. **Typos.** While a mistake in spelling or grammar isn't the end of the world (or is it?), it evinces sloppiness that calls into question your professionalism and commitment.
13. **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.
14. **Deadlines.** Assignments are due — 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 the assignment on time. Assignments that are late will be penalized by a full letter (from an A to a B) per 24 hours.
15. **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**

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Overview</b>	<b>Audience</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Length</b>
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, and explain your edits.	Professor Rick	To demonstrate mastery of the myths and maxims	At least one page
Branding portfolio	You're applying for a job — a real job that is currently open; you must include the job description. To this end, write a cover letter, resume, and five “career titles” for your LinkedIn profile.	The respective recruiter	To secure an interview	Resume: one page, single spaced  Cover letter: at least 250 words
SWOT analysis	Write a <i>thoughtful</i> analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOTs) related to your business-writing abilities.	Professor Rick	To self-reflect	At least three pages
Briefing memo	Write a <i>comprehensive yet concise</i> memo that briefs me for one of the scenarios I'll designate.	Your boss (in this case, me)	To synthesize interesting information from a variety of sources in a way that's easy to remember	At least three pages

Deliverable	Overview	Audience	Goal	Length
	You are required to use the writing center for this assignment; your tutor must email me confirmation.			
Messaging platform	Write a messaging platform to promote <i>SEND</i> .	College students	To sell books	At least three pages
Headlines	I'll pick two current events. You'll write 25 headlines for each one (for a total of 50 headlines), and identify the techniques you used for each headline.	College students	To draw clicks (credibly)	N/A
Request for proposal	Write a request for proposals for one of the services I designate	Vendors in the given field	To draw a handful of <i>substantive</i> responses	At least three pages
Blurb	Your final assignment is a PowerPoint-based presentation that you'll deliver to the class. Before you begin, I must approve a blurb that outlines your talk.  You are required to rehearse your presentation with another student from class.	Your classmates	To capture the attention of a typical college student  If <i>persuasive</i> : to convince your classmates to agree with you  If <i>informational</i> : to equip your classmates with enough knowledge of the given subject to converse intelligently about it	At least 200 words
Presentation	Ibid.	Ibid.	Ibid.	Six to seven minutes, and at least 15 slides

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