

Jonathan Rick  
 English 394 (1701): Business Writing  
 Fall 2017  
 Tuesdays, 6:30-9:10 PM  
 Tawes 1320

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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. Professional Branding	Cover letter, resume, LinkedIn, and elevator pitch
3. Everyday Skills	Email, numbers, and social media
4. Framing and Packaging	Headlines and headings
5. A Manager's Toolbox	Pitching, proposals, and PowerPoint

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 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. After completing 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.

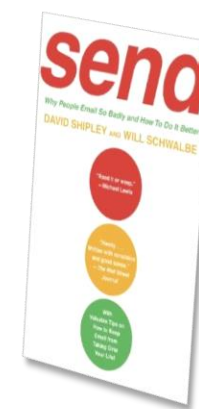
I appreciate being challenged, so never hesitate to disagree. Similarly, pose questions whenever they occur. When in doubt, ask, don't assume. (But, please, please, check the syllabus first; [most of your questions have likely been addressed here.](#))

*What's nice to know:* By dawn, I'm in the pool, swimming for my local Masters team. By daytime, I run a [digital-marketing consultancy](#), where I help people use the web to shape 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 your readings appear here.)
4. 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](mailto:jrick@umd.edu). Alternatively, I'm available by phone, at (202) 596-1882.

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	Homework Due	Homework Afterward
August 29	Course Introduction and Myths and Maxims	1. Syllabus		Syllabus Feedback
September 5	Myths and Maxims	<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>	Syllabus Feedback	Myths and Maxims
September 12	Branding 101	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">The Cover Letter Formula That Skyrocketed My Interviews From 0% to 55%</a></li> <li>2. <a href="#">I Read 500 Cover Letters for Entry-Level</a></li> </ol>	Myths and Maxims	Branding Portfolio

Date	Topic	Reading Beforehand	Homework Due	Homework Afterward
		<p><a href="#">Media Jobs</a></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Cover Letters Are Hard to Write — but This Template Makes It a Breeze</a></li> <li><a href="#">Show Me the Numbers!</a></li> <li><a href="#">Delete These 9 Things From Your Resume</a></li> <li><a href="#">8 Reasons This Is an Excellent Resume for a Recent College Graduate</a></li> <li><a href="#">19 Reasons Why This Is an Excellent Resume*</a></li> </ol>		
September 19	Branding 202	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">What Your Email Says About Your Brand*</a></li> <li><a href="#">10 Reasons Why You Didn't Get the Job</a></li> <li><a href="#">Prepare for a Job Interview the Way CEOs Rehearse for a Media Interview</a></li> </ol>	Branding Portfolio	SWOT Analysis
September 26	Conferences	We'll meet one on one for up to 14 minutes to review your progress.	SWOT Analysis	
October 3	Numbers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">You Can't Spell "Numbers" Without "Numb"*</a></li> </ol>		
October 10	Email and Social Media	<p>Bring a laptop to this class.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">SEND: Why People Email So Badly and How to Do It Better*</a></li> <li><a href="#">Saying "No" Is Better Than Saying Nothing</a></li> <li><a href="#">10 Easy Ways to Get Busy People to Respond to Your Emails</a></li> <li><a href="#">The Importance of Common Courtesy in Emails</a></li> </ol>		Messaging Platform

Date	Topic	Reading Beforehand	Homework Due	Homework Afterward
October 17	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> <li>2. <a href="#">How to Write Attention-Grabbing Headlines That Convert*</a></li> </ol>	Messaging Platform	
October 24	Conferences	We'll meet one on one for up to 14 minutes to review your progress.		
October 31	Headings and Pitching	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">How — and How Not — to Introduce Someone via Email</a></li> </ol>		Headlines
November 7	Proposals	<p>Bring a laptop to this class.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">Are You Making These 7 Mistakes With Your RFPs?</a></li> </ol>	Headlines	Proposal
November 14	PowerPoint	<p>Bring a laptop to this class.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">Which Is More Important: Linguistic Perfection, or Conversational Engagement?</a></li> <li>2. <a href="#">The Top 10 Secrets of Every Memorable PowerPoint Presentation</a></li> <li>3. <a href="#">The Secrets of TED Talks*</a></li> <li>4. <a href="#">You Suck at PowerPoint!*</a></li> <li>5. <a href="#">Slide Makeovers: SlideShare</a></li> <li>6. <a href="#">Lots of Little Things You Can Do to Make Your Slides More Pleasing to the Eye</a></li> </ol>	Proposal	Blurb
November 21	<i>No class — happy</i>		Blurb	

Date	Topic	Reading Beforehand	Homework Due	Homework Afterward
	<i>Thanksgiving</i>			
November 28	Message Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">5 Things You Need to Know About Media Training</a></li> <li><a href="#">The 2 Secrets of Media Training</a></li> </ol>		
December 5	Presentations		Presentation	

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

### How I Grade

In grading your assignments, 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	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 doesn't have enough information, does something inappropriate for a given situation, or contains major and pervasive problems.

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

<b>Letter</b>	<b>A+</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>B+</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>B-</b>	<b>C+</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>C-</b>	<b>D+</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D-</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Number</b>	100	96	93	89	86	83	79	76	73	69	66	63	0
<b>Final Grade</b>	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:

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1. Branding Portfolio	15
2. SWOT Analysis	15
3. Messaging Platform	15
4. Headlines	10
5. Proposal	15
6. Presentation	15
7. Participation (including syllabus feedback, myths and maxims, and quizzes)	15

### **Revisions**

Want to know the difference between good writing and bad writing? Easy: good writers revise. And then they revise again. And 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 memo, your revised assignment, your original assignment

Note: your memo should not be a mere list of mistakes, but a reflection on lessons learned.

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

Do you know what a “smart” quotation mark is? Should you write “25 September,” “September 25,” or “September 25<sup>th</sup>”? The only way to be sure is to attend each class. After all, 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**

- 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. 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.
- 5. 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) every 24 hours.



6. **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.
7. **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, so I can credit you appropriately.
8. **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](#).
9. **Formatting (Part a).** For each assignment, please bring a paper copy and staple it. I do not accept homework via email.
10. **Formatting (Part b).** 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 earn an automatic F — just as proposals, in the real world, which don't follow instructions are summarily rejected.
11. **Formatting (Part c).** Every assignment — except your cover letter and resume — should employ 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

12. **Formatting (Part d).** Every assignment — except your resume — should include a word count at the bottom.
13. **Formatting (Part e).** Every assignment — except your resume — should use one-inch margins.
14. **Problems.** Questions? Concerns? Suggestions? See me sooner rather than later; problems tend to grow as they age.

**15. 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.")

**16. Extra Readings.** I'll often send emails with links to interesting and timely articles. I hope you'll not only read these articles, 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.)

### Homework

Name	Overview	Audience	Goal	Length
Syllabus Feedback	Review the syllabus, and email me a specific question or comment about these documents.	Professor Rick	To demonstrate that you understand the course guidelines	N/A
Myths and Maxims	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's currently open; you must include the job description. To this end, write a cover letter, a resume, and five "career titles" for your LinkedIn profile.	The given recruiter	To secure an interview	Resume: one page, single spaced  Cover letter: at least 250 words

Name	Overview	Audience	Goal	Length
SWOT Analysis	Analyze four aspects of your business writing: your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.  You must use the writing center for this assignment; your tutor must email me confirmation.	Professor Rick	To self-reflect	At least three pages
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 20 headlines for each event (for a total of 40 headlines), and identify the techniques you used for each headline.	Your parents	To draw clicks without engaging in clickbait	N/A
Proposal	Write a proposal in response to an RFP that I issue.	Professor Rick	To win the work	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 must rehearse your presentation with another student from class (I'll assign partners).	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	At least 200 words

Name	Overview	Audience	Goal	Length
			intelligently about it	
Presentation	Ibid.	Ibid.	Ibid.	Six to seven minutes, and at least 15 slides

Because the format I use for each assignment is so specific, we'll 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 on a template, you'll be unhappy with your grade.