University of Calgary
Department of Communication and Culture

Communications Studies COMS 363 (Lec. 01)
Professional and Technical Communication
Winter 2013

Note: This document is the basic syllabus for the course, but more detailed documents and schedules will be posted on the Blackboard site.

An on-line course on the Blackboard system: https://blackboard.ucalgary.ca/
Please check the Blackboard site at least twice a week for course materials, readings, & announcements. There will be no class meetings or lectures (face to face or virtual), but you will have to be prepared to learn from a variety of printed and multimedia materials.

Instructor: Dr. Doug Brent   ☎ 220-5458   Social Sciences 312
E-mail: dabrent@ucalgary.ca (**Please put COMS 363 in your subject line so that I don't miss your message.**)
Office Hours: Wednesday 1:00 – 3:00. I realize that this time may not be convenient for all of you, and I am always happy to arrange other times by appointment – just e-mail me.

Markers:
Marking Group 1: Anabelle Bernard Fournier, anabellebf@gmail.com
Marking Group 2: Stephanie Dayes, sdayes@gmail.com
Marking Group 3: Allan McDougall, allan@polymorphology.com
Marking Group 4: Andrea Hanslip, andreamarker@mac.com

Note: It is usually best to address questions, appeals and other matters directly to me (Doug Brent). If the questions are likely to be shared by other students, I will post clarifying announcements for everyone's benefit.

Course description and objectives:

An introduction to professional and technical communication.

Every workplace calls for different conventions of writing and different generic forms. This course is not intended to provide a cookbook of all the different recipes you might need. Rather, it will help you develop general concepts and tools to help you make sense of workplace writing situations as they arise.

This course will help you develop

- a rhetorical approach to crafting documents--one in which you critically consider your purpose in writing, the needs of your audience(s), and relevant features of the context in which you are writing;
- an understanding of current theories of genre and familiarity with the conventions and composing strategies for a range of written genres, including business correspondence, proposals, and reports;
- document design strategies to ensure that your documents look professional, promote easy retrieval of information, and use visuals to communicate information effectively;
- writing strategies to keep your writing focused, coherent, and readable;
- a sound command of the mechanics of writing and the skills to edit effectively to eliminate common errors in sentence structure, grammar, word use, spelling, and punctuation;
- competence in the use of a standard style of documentation;

- familiarity with a range of resources for professional writers, including tools for online research, for online composing, and for collaborative writing;
- skills in conducting primary research (usability analysis, surveys);
- competence in preparing PowerPoint presentations.

The course will also give you the opportunity to develop your skills as an effective member of a collaborative writing team in an online setting. However, completing your final project with a group is optional, not mandatory.

Required materials & academic support:

Graves, H., & Graves. R. (2012). A strategic guide to technical communication, 2nd ed. Peterborough ON: Broadview Press.

You **must** have access to this book in order to complete the quizzes and other assignments. **Make sure that you have the new second edition.** There are enough changes from the first edition that you will not be able to complete the quizzes successfully without the latest version.

Additional readings and resource materials will be posted on the course Blackboard site.

Technical requirements & support:

You must have composing software that can generate files readable in Microsoft Word 2000 or higher. If you are not using Microsoft Word, please save your files in a Word-compatible format. If you encounter technical problems, please contact the IT support desk (phone 220-5555 or e-mail itsupport@ucalgary.ca).

You must also be able to read and create PowerPoint-compatible files.

TO DO: Please go into the Blackboard site and send an e-mail to yourself. If you do not receive the e-mail, it is your responsibility to update your e-mail address in the system (edit your profile in your Student Centre). If you neglect to update your e-mail address in the system, you will miss important messages related to this online course.

You may find that the system forces you to use your ucalgary.ca address even if it is not your preferred address. In this case, it is doubly important to check your ucalgary address frequently (I would recommend daily), as Blackboard will automatically send messages there. You are responsible for making sure that you are receiving communications, which is particularly important in the case of an on-line course.

Be sure to check your e-mail often and to keep your e-mail box cleaned out. If your e-mail box is full, you may miss important messages. Messages bounced back to the instructor because of full e-mailboxes will normally not be resent. (Returned messages because of full e-mail boxes tends to be a particular problem with Hotmail accounts.)

Assignments:

Note: There will be an assignment or quiz due almost every week. Please print out the printable version of the schedule (available on Blackboard) and tape it to your fridge so you don't miss any,

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

5%	Quiz 1	Monday Jan. 21 (individual)
15%	Recommendation report	Monday Jan. 28 (individual)
5%	Quiz 2	Monday Feb. 4 (individual)
5%	Quiz 3	Monday Feb. 11 (individual)
10%	Project proposal	Monday Feb. 25 (individual or group)
15%	Critique of a visual	Monday March 11 (individual)
15%	PowerPoint presentation & notes	Monday March 25 (individual or group)
30%	Final report (with letter of transmittal)	Tuesday April16 (individual or group)

There will be no registrar-scheduled final exam in this course. All assignments will be submitted and returned electronically via Blackboard (not by e-mail, please).

Quizzes are brief multiple-choice assignments completed on Blackboard. They are not intended as tests of knowledge as much as instruments designed to make you think about and apply the readings.

The **recommendation report** is a brief (under 1200 words) report addressed to a hypothetical supervisor who has asked you for a recommendation on various collaborative writing tools. It will require some research and will give you practice in formatting information obtained from secondary sources as well as in addressing the needs of an audience and justifying conclusions.

The **critique of a visual** is a brief (under 1000 words) assignment that asks you to select a visual and discuss its effectiveness using criteria studied in the course.

The **proposal, PowerPoint and final report** are linked assignments. The final report is a full-featured, substantive report (2500-3000 words, not counting letter of transmittal, references and appendices) on a web site usability study. It will require you to conduct both secondary and primary research and integrate the results into a report. The proposal will summarize your plans for the report so that your marker can supply critique and advice. The PowerPoint assignment will be a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the report. You will submit it before the final draft of the report so that your marker can supply further advice that you can use to improve the final report. These three assignments may be completed in a small group or individually (see below for details).

Due dates, late policy, return of assignments, and grade appeals:

- **Assignments are due** at midnight on the date assigned. Detailed guidelines for each assignment will be posted on Blackboard.
- **Grace period:** You have an automatic 48-hour grace period on all written assignments. Once the grace period has elapsed, late assignments will be docked one letter grade level (e.g., from B to B-) for each day the assignment is late (including weekend days). For example, an assignment due Wednesday but submitted the following Tuesday would have a four-level grade deduction for late submission.
- Assignments submitted late may or may not receive detailed comments, and may or may not be returned as promptly as assignments submitted on time. However, all assignments must nonetheless be submitted in order to pass the course, even if they are so late that they receive an F. Extensions will be granted only by the instructor and only with good reason.
- NOTE: If you use the grace period, your marker gets a grace period too. Assignments submitted after the official deadline may not necessarily be returned before the next assignment is due.
- **Quizzes** are theoretically due on the date assigned, but in fact never expire until the last day of class and carry no late penalties. I really, really advise you to complete them when required because much of the information that you will learn by doing so feeds directly into upcoming written assignments. However, if you choose to leave them until the end of the course, that's your problem.
- Assignments will normally be returned within two weeks.
- **Appeals:** If you wish to appeal your grade on an assignment, please write me an email explaining exactly why you think the grade should have been higher. You must address my comments specifically and explain which ones you accept and which ones you think are unreasonable or which you simply don't understand.

A note on word count:

A workplace supervisor who asks for a two-page memo either will not read a four-page response, or will not be in the best frame of mind when doing so. However, if it leaks a little onto the third page, and has enough real meat to make it worth reading, few supervisors will complain. With this in mind, then:

1. All assignments should stick as closely as possible to the assigned length. A truly excellent assignment nails the question exactly and is the suggested length.
2. However, there is a 10% grace in length. Therefore a 500-word assignment would not be actively penalized until it reached 550 words. Over 550 words, no assignment, however brilliant otherwise, would receive a clear A.

Group project option:

The proposal, PowerPoint and final report form a connected group of assignments that may be done individually or in a group of up to three members. If you know someone whom you'd like to work with, you may form a group. Let me know who you are working with.

Please avoid collaborating with someone in the other on-line lecture section (L02) as this is extremely difficult to accomplish. Prof. Andre and I have similar assignments but they are by no means identical, and if you try to collaborate with someone in her section, you will encounter all kinds of logistical nightmares.

If you form a group and would like your group space enabled on Blackboard, please email the instructor with the names of all your group members. Group spaces include a private discussion board, a file exchange tool, and a group email feature.

Note on group grades:

All group members will normally receive the same grade on group assignments. It is up to each group to ensure that the group's workload is distributed fairly among members and that all group members have a chance to review the final draft of any group document before it is submitted. Note that if a group member's name appears on an assignment but that group member did not contribute to the document, he or she is guilty of plagiarism. Group assignments should include only the names of members who contributed to the document.

Research Ethics

Whenever you perform research with human participants (i.e. surveys, interviews, observation) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research.
Ethics forms and information specific to COMS 363 will be posted on the course Blackboard site.

Writing Skills Statement

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, although to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Research papers must be properly documented.

If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support

Grades: Written assignments will be given a letter grade and quizzes will be graded in numerical values. The following grading system is used in the Dept. of Communication and Culture to convert between letter grades and percentages.

	Grading Scale	Midpoint (used for calculations)	
A+	96 - 100.00 %	98.0%	**Note:** Except for F grades, the midpoints of the percentage ranges will be used for calculating final grades.
A	90 - 95.99	93.0	
A -	85 - 89.99	87.5	
B+	80 - 84.99	82.5	F grades will be converted to zero.
B	75 - 79.99	77.5	
B-	70 - 74.99	72.5	**Quizzes** are marked directly as numerical grades, so there is no need to convert them to letter-grades and back again using midpoints. On a quiz, a 5 is a 5 and a 3 is a 3.
C+	65 - 69.99	67.5	
C	60 - 64.99	62.5	
C-	55 - 59.99	57.5	
D+	53 - 54.99	54.0	
D	50 - 52.99	51.5	
F	0 - 49.99	0.0	

Plagiarism

Feel free to discuss your ideas with others and to have someone review your written work to point out weaknesses and typos. These practices are common in the workplace and do not constitute plagiarism as long as you do the corrections and the rewriting. All of the following, however, constitute plagiarism:

- passing off the work of others as your own
- having someone else actively correct your assignment (as opposed to pointing out problems that you correct yourself)
- submitting work that you have done previously (or that you are now doing for another course) as if it were new work done for this course
- borrowing wording from published or online material without using quotation marks (or formatting long quoted passages according to documentation conventions)
- using wording, ideas, information, or graphics from published material or from the internet without acknowledging the source.

In other words, using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is considered plagiarism. **Plagiarism is a serious offence: it can result in failure on an assignment, failure of the course, or even suspension or expulsion from university.** (See the *University of Calgary Calendar.*)

Note that you must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas *where they appear in your text*. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. Readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. These requirements apply to assignments submitted in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media, and material taken from such formats. Information about documentation styles is included in your textbook and in the course documents posted on Blackboard. If you need further guidance about whether or how to document a source, please contact your instructor.

Academic Misconduct

For information on academic misconduct and the consequences thereof please see the current University of Calgary Calendar at the following link;
http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html

Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre (220-8237) and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of the course.

Students' Union

For details about the current Students' Union contacts for the Faculty of Arts see
http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/governance/elections/home.html

Student Ombudsman

For details on the Student Ombudsman's Office see   http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds

Emergency Evacuation and Assembly points

For information on the emergency evacuation procedures and the assembly points see
http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints

"SAFEWALK" Program -- 220-5333
Campus Security will escort individuals day or night -- call 220-5333 for assistance. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking lot booths.