Communications Studies (COMS) 363 - Lecture 02
Professional and Technical Communication
Fall 2013
Web-based Section

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Course Description

An introduction to professional and technical communication in diverse media. Students will learn the rhetorical dimensions of workplace settings as well as the process of planning, composing, and delivering professional and technical communication for various audiences. Prerequisites: Completion of 4 or more full-course equivalents.

Additional Information

This section of the course will be offered entirely online. There are no face-to-face classes or tutorials in this course. Opportunities for student-teacher interaction and guidance are provided by online discussion boards, online conferences, email, telephone, face-to-face office hours, and appointments with the instructor. Students may work in groups on the term project and are encouraged to study together.

While the instructor directs the course and handles all student communication, a small staff of professional markers grades and provides feedback on all student assignments. Each student will be placed in a "marking section" of approximately 35 students assigned to each marker. The instructor and markers work closely together as a team, meeting before grading each assignment to discuss sample student papers and ensure consensus on standards. The instructor ensures grading is fair across sections.

Objectives of the Course

This course teaches students to adapt workplace communication to organizational contexts as well as broader social and cultural contexts and technologies. General conventions have evolved for proposals, reports, memos, and presentations, yet successful communication requires awareness of the context and adaptation to it. Diverse audiences, complex subject matter, and new technologies are among many factors that make communication challenging.

This course will help students develop:

- a rhetorical approach to crafting documents--one which carefully considers purpose, audience, ethics, and relevant features of the organizational context, such as security and privacy.

- an understanding of current theories of genre and familiarity with the conventions for a range of written genres, including business correspondence, proposals, reports, and public websites.

- an understanding of website navigation, usability and usability testing, since an increasing amount of professional communication needs to be produced for online viewing.

- skills in conducting your own original primary research on the usability of online communication products and their audiences (expert analyses, surveys).

- the ability to learn and use technologies relevant to professional writing, including applications for online research, collaborative writing, and group project management.

- document design strategies to ensure that documents look professional, promote easy retrieval of information, and use visuals effectively.

- competence in preparing well-designed PowerPoint presentation slides and notes.

- writing strategies to keep documents focused, coherent, and readable. This includes the skills to edit to eliminate common errors and style problems in written English, as well as the ability to organize ideas into sentences, paragraphs, and sections.

- a standard style of documentation for sources. Documentation systems vary across academic disciplines, professions and workplaces. APA Style will be used in this course.

Internet and electronic communication

Internet access: Students must have frequent, regular access to the internet and email. The course will be held online via the Instructure Canvas learning management system (see http://www.instructure.com). For convenience, a link to the COMS 363L02 Fall 2013 Canvas Course will be placed in U of C Blackboard. After the U of C course add/drop date, the course website will be accessible only via secure login.

Canvas is very easy to use. If you need instructions, see the Canvas Student Quickstart Guide or the full Canvas Student Guide. Should any difficulties arise that are not resolved there, notify the instructor.

Sending email: When initiating an email to your instructor from your own email program, email tania.smith@ucalgary.ca and put "363" anywhere in the subject line. You may also use the Canvas "inbox" to send email to your instructor, teammates and other students.

Email management: Check your email account often and keep it from exceeding its capacity. If course emails and notifications are bouncing or being sent to your Spam or Junk folder, you may miss important information. Messages bounced back to the instructor will normally not be resent. Edit your Canvas notification preferences and default email address to customize them to your needs.

Supported browsers & plugins: The Canvas IT team keeps their technology up to date with all the major browsers (i.e. Firefox, Internet Explorer) and operating systems (Mac, Windows, etc). However, older technologies may not be compatible, and some users' configurations may cause incompatibility. Technical requirements are listed here on the Canvas Help Center. Canvas apps for iPhone, iPad and Android exist, but some course materials or screens may not be formatted for mobile devices. A PDF reader is required.
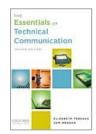
Word processing software: Assignments must be submitted in Microsoft Office file formats (.doc, .docx, .ppt, .pptx). Assignments require professional formatting of headings, tables, colors, fonts, etc. Microsoft Office software is highly recommended and is available to U of C Students a special low price: see http://www.ucalgary.ca/it/student/software . Alternatively, free programs such as LibreOffice https://www.libreoffice.org/ or Apache OpenOffice may suffice.

Textbooks and Readings

Tebeaux, E. and Dragga, S. (2011). *The Essentials of Technical Communication* (2nd Ed). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Optional online edition via CourseSmart = $30.

The SECOND edition of the textbook is required to complete the quizzes worth 15% of the course. Students are expected use the textbook when completing assignments.

Additional required and recommended readings will be linked to the course website.

Assignments and Evaluation

15% **Open-book online Quizzes (Individual).**
- 5% Quiz 1 **Sept. 27**
- 5% Quiz 2 **Oct. 11**
- 5% Quiz 3 **Nov. 01**

8-10 multiple choice and short answer questions each. Based on the textbook and other required readings. All quizzes are open from the start of the term, but cannot be submitted late. Quizzes not submitted by the deadline will receive a grade of F (0).

15% **Online Collaboration Recommendation Memo (Individual)** **Oct. 04**
750-1000 word memo plus appendices and reference list. A research-based critical review and recommendation of an online collaboration technology useful for professional writers.

15% **Term Project Proposal (Individual or group)** **Oct. 18**
750-1000 word memo plus appendices. The COMS 363 Term Project is to perform a usability study of a public organizational website. It involves three assignments: the Proposal, a PowerPoint, and the Final Report.

10% **PowerPoint Draft and Peer Review**
The PowerPoint is a progress report for the term project. Its draft undergoes peer review. Drafts and reviews are posted to discussion forums set up within marking sections.

- **2% PowerPoint Draft (Individual or group)** **Nov. 08**
  Markers assess the draft's completeness and timeliness. Drafts will only receive feedback from peers. Drafts may be penalized by 50% or more if late or incomplete.
- **8% Peer Review Memo (Individual)** **Nov. 15**
  500-750 word memo providing a helpful review of a peer's PowerPoint Draft.

15% **PowerPoint Final (Individual or group)** **Nov. 22**
9-12 slides, presenter notes under slides, and reference list.

30% **Final Report (Individual or group)** **Dec. 06**
2500-3000 words plus letter of transmittal, executive summary, and references. Reports the complete term project, including the findings of research and analysis.

Specific assignment guidelines will be available on the course website.

NOTE: All assignment components worth more than 5% must be submitted, even if late, or a final grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

Policy for Late Assignments

All assignments are due online by 6:00PM (18:00) Mountain Standard Time (MST) on their stated due date. Of course, you may submit early at your convenience. A grace period of 30 hours (until 23:59MST the next day) is allowed for technical difficulties, short-term illness, or scheduling challenges. No late penalty will apply to items submitted in the grace period.*

Late penalties: For all assignments worth more than 5% of the final grade,* a late penalty of one letter grade level (e.g., from B to B-) may be applied for each calendar day it is late—*including the grace period* and weekend days. For example, an assignment due Friday but submitted the following Tuesday would receive a 4-level grade deduction. Verifiable documentation may be required to waive penalties.

*NOTE: Unique penalties apply for Quizzes (5% each) and the PowerPoint Draft (2%): Quizzes cannot be submitted late. The Draft may be penalized 50% if later than the grace period.

Assignment Submission

Do NOT email assignments. All assignments must be submitted online via Canvas.

File format & File names: Submit all assignments in .doc, .docx, .ppt or .pptx format.
Use the following format for naming your files. Instead of spaces, use – or _ characters:

- 363-recomm-Brown-Sarah.docx
- 363-proposal-JonesT-NgoF-CarterB.doc (group assignment)

Identify your Final Report file as the draft or the final version:

- 363-report-Brown-Sarah-DRAFT.doc
- 363-report-JonesT-NgoF-CarterB-FINAL.docx (group assignment)

Verify submission: After submitting your assignment, re-enter the assignment area to download and re-open your file(s) from Canvas. It is the student's responsibility to verify successful upload and the intended version of the document.

Backup copy: It is the student's responsibility to keep a secure backup copy of each submitted assignment. Consider using services like DropBox or Box.com to store your backup files elsewhere online.

Temporary submission: If Canvas is temporarily unavailable to you, two alternatives may prevent or reduce late penalties. *You must still submit the assignment via Canvas for grading*.

1. *Blackboard:* Use Blackboard's Digital Dropbox (Tools menu). Select "send" to send it to your instructor's Dropbox. Verify your file submission. *Re-submit on Canvas as soon as possible.*

2. *In paper:* Our department office in SS320 has a stamp and sign-in system for assignment submission and an after-hours drop box in the wall. *Re-submit on Canvas as soon as possible.*

When you re-submit to Canvas, write a text comment in the assignment's submission area about the method of your earlier submission. This will enable us to waive late penalties that may otherwise apply.

Assignment length: Assignments may be 10% longer than the maximum or 10% shorter than the minimum. A truly excellent assignment fulfills all the requirements and is not wordy or repetitive.

The number of *words, not pages* is used for length guidelines since the number of words per page varies widely in professional writing. The official word count focuses on the student's own sentences within the body of the document. *Do NOT count words in long quotations (over 40 words), title page, table of contents, tables & figures, captions, footnotes, references, appendices, page numbers, running heads.* To calculate word count in Microsoft Word, select the text to calculate and go to Review > Word Count. Alternatively, paste text into an online counter: http://www.textfixer.com/tools/online-word-counter.php

Group Term Project Option: If you wish to do the Term Project assignments as a group (2-4 students), finalize your group as soon as possible before the deadline of **October 11** (one week before the proposal is due). All group members will then be assigned to the same Marker.

Groups of three students or more should use an online application to securely share and archive group files, messages and term project research data. Each group must ensure that workload is distributed fairly among members and that all have a chance to review the final draft before submission.

By submitting a copy of the group's file(s) with his/her name on it, a student attests that he or she has significantly contributed to it, has approved the submitted file(s), and is responsible for timely submission. File names and title pages can only include the names of co-authors. It is plagiarism to submit a file one did not substantially co-author. Any group member's file may be downloaded for grading. All members receive the same grade.

Grading System

The following grading system is used in the Department of Communication and Culture:

	Grading scale	Grade point	U of C Calendar description
A+	96-100	4.0	Outstanding
A	90-95.99	4.0	Excellent--superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of subject matter.
A -	85-89.99	3.7	
B+	80-84.99	3.3	
B	75-79.99	3.0	Good--clearly above average performance with knowledge of subject matter generally complete.
B-	70-74.99	2.7	
C+	65-69.99	2.3	
C	60-64.99	2.0	Satisfactory--basic understanding of the subject matter.
C-	55-59.99	1.7	
D+	53-54.99	1.3	
D	50-52.99	1.0	Minimal pass--marginal performance; generally insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject.
F	0-49	0	Fail--unsatisfactory performance or failure to meet course requirements.

Assignment grades may be provided as letter grades, percentages, or points.

- Normally assignments are given a letter grade (A-, B+), and markers will convert this to points using the midpoint of the scale shown above. For example, A- will be converted to 87.5, and B- to 72.5. However, F grades will be converted to zero.

- If an assignment is given points on another scale, its equivalent percentage will be used in final grade calculations. A score of 3.5 out of 5 on a Quiz will be considered 70 in calculations.

Grading timeline: Normally, assignments will be graded, marked and returned on Canvas within two weeks (14 days), with some exceptions. PowerPoint Drafts and Peer Reviews may be graded within the same period as the final PowerPoint assignment. A grading period may be extended to accommodate a holiday. Any assignment submitted late may be returned later than normal.

Grade concerns and appeals: All concerns about grades, marking, assignment expectations, and progress in the course should be directed *to the instructor, not your marker.* Appeals should be made within 5 days of receiving a grade, should be well reasoned, and may require an appointment and/or verifiable documentation. Students who earn F, D or D+ may appeal to revise only one such assignment per term, except for the final report. If revision is permitted, the instructor will *average* the original and new scores.

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

This course is conducted in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP). Students should identify themselves on all written work by placing their full names on the first page and by submitting files via Canvas login. However, keep your private information secure. Do NOT place your UofC ID number or other private information on drafts or assignment files that will be viewed by your peers. More information: http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy**.**

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: http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support

Plagiarism

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university. All of the following constitute plagiarism:

- passing off the work of others as your own

- having someone else correct or edit your assignment (however, someone may make review suggestions or point out problems that you then correct yourself).

- submitting work that you have submitted previously for another course (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 block-quote formatting

- using wording, ideas, information, or graphics from published material or from the Internet without acknowledging the source.

A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases, ideas and images/media and *cite them where they appear in your text*. Readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. This includes assignments submitted in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media, and material taken from such sources.

This course requires APA style for documentation of sources; APA resources will be provided.

Please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3rd Floor Taylor Family Digital Library, http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support) if you have any questions.

Academic Misconduct

For information on academic misconduct and the consequences thereof, see the current University of Calgary Calendar at 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 Student Accessibility Services (403-220-8237, http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/) and discuss your needs directly 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 – 403-220-5333

Campus Security will escort individuals day or night -- call 403-220-5333 for assistance. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking lot booths.

Research Ethics

In any course (such as COMS 363) that requires you to perform research with human participants (i.e. surveys, interviews, observation), you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. COMS 363 students must include ethics considerations in Proposals and Final Reports.

Failure to adequately address ethical considerations will result in an F grade until students address omissions in both documents. Ethics forms and information specific to COMS 363 will be posted on Canvas. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see

- The Faculty of Arts Research Ethics site: http://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/research/research-ethics
- University of Calgary Research Ethics site: http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/ethics/cfreb

Instructor's Educational Research

To improve the quality of teaching and learning in this subject area, your instructor and research partners occasionally analyze data about student learning that is gathered naturally in the course of teaching. They may present aggregate and anonymous student data at conferences or in academic publications. However, the contents of assignments, online posts and emails submitted under your name will not be used in research unless you give consent to a formal request for them.

During the course, or shortly after it has concluded, you may be recruited to participate in a formal research project through a survey, interview, or by donating assignments or messages, as outlined in a consent form attached to a recruitment message. You are free to decline participation or withdraw at any time. If any consent forms are collected during the course, they will be held by a third party until after final grades have been submitted to prevent any influence on your grades or instructor communication.

Schedule of Lectures and Readings

The course Calendar and week-by-week Modules will be provided on Canvas.