University of Calgary
Department of Communication and Culture

Communications Studies (COMS) 363 - Lecture 01
Professional and Technical Communication
Spring 2014
Online 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 forums, email, Skype, telephone, face-to-face office hours, and appointments with the instructor. Students 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 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 monitors grades and marking to ensure grading is fair across sections, and may occasionally add further feedback on assignments or collaborate with markers. Students communicate with the instructor (not their section's marker) about assessment.

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. 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 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 users

- skills in conducting research and analyzing raw data on the usability of online communication products and their audiences (expert analyses, surveys).

- skills in the use of special or advanced features of programs and online technologies relevant to professional communication, such as Microsoft Office, Google Drive, and other applications

- skills involved in professional collaborative research and writing, and the effective use of online systems for collaborative file sharing and messages.

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

- 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. A high-speed Internet connection is highly recommended. The course will be held online via the U of C's new Desire2Learn (D2L) learning management system at https://d2l.ucalgary.ca/. Download a personal backup copy of this course outline and all online course materials in case you need them when Internet access is temporarily unavailable. A PDF reader is required.

Supported technologies: Course technologies usually work with all the major browsers (i.e. Firefox, Internet Explorer, Chrome, Safari) and operating systems (Mac, Windows, etc). However, compatibility problems may occur with outdated browsers, plugins or apps, and usability issues may occur on mobile devices. Check your system's compatibility in Desire2Learn via My Tools > System Check.

Sending email: Use Desire2Learn's "Communication" tab to contact the instructor or post messages to forums. When initiating an email to your instructor from your own email program, send email to tania.smith@ucalgary.ca and put "COMS 363" anywhere in the subject line.

Email management: Students are responsible for ensuring they receive course email notifications and messages from the instructor. Make sure course messages do not get filtered into spam or junk folders or get rejected by your mail server. By default, Desire2Learn will use the email address associated with your U of C ID. Configure your notification preferences in your D2L Account Settings.

Word processing software: The use of Microsoft Office software (ideally, 2007 or later) is highly recommended. Assignments must be submitted in Microsoft Office file formats (.doc, .docx). Assignments require advanced features of Office programs for professional formatting of tables, graphs, tables of contents, page numbering, headers, etc. MS Office is available to U of C Students at a special low price: see http://www.ucalgary.ca/it/student/software . Alternatively, free programs such as LibreOffice https://www.libreoffice.org/ or OpenOffice may suffice for many tasks, but may cause document formatting problems and incompatibility with group members' programs.

Textbooks and Readings

Tebeaux, E. & Dragga, S. (2012). *The essentials of technical communication* (2nd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press. [Optional online edition via CourseSmart = $30]
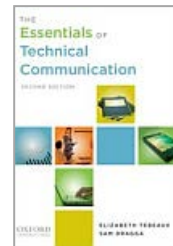
The SECOND edition of the textbook is required to complete course quizzes. Students are expected to refer to the textbook when completing assignments. Additional required and recommended readings will be linked to the course website.

Assignments and Evaluation

40%   Open-book online Quizzes (Individual).

- 10%   Quiz 1   **May 21**
- 10%   Quiz 2   **May 28**
- 10%   Quiz 3   **June 4**
- 10%   Quiz 4   **June 11**

Each quiz consists of 10-20 selection-based or short-answer questions and 1-2 long answer questions. Questions are based on the textbook and online readings and resources. Students are given from the beginning of term (for Quiz 1) or at least 2 weeks to complete a quiz before it is due. Any quiz not submitted by its deadline will receive a grade of F (0).

5%   Research Participation and Reflection (Individual)   **May 30

Part of the data students will analyze for the Group Report is gathered by surveys of users' responses to a website. Students must either participate in 3 online surveys on other websites being analyzed by COMS 363 students, OR successfully recruit 3 other people to participate in the survey of the website they themselves are analyzing, OR

combination these two forms of participation. Students submit a reflection on their survey participation and what they learned.

20%   Individual Report   June 2
1250-1800-word report, plus letter of transmittal and appendices. This is a report on a website's aims, audiences, and development potential, and it offers a preliminary website analysis using usability sources and principles. The report does not depend on usability survey results.

30%   Group Report   Individual Contributions: June 9
**   Group Draft: June 16**
**   Final: June 23**

Reports the findings of survey research and the group's website analysis. By June 9, each member submits an individual contribution (a figure or table based on survey research and 250 words of analysis), or the individual will receive up to a 5% penalty on their individual Group Report grade. By June 16, a complete 2000-word minimum group draft must be submitted or the group will receive a 2.5% penalty on the Group Report grade. Peers in the group will review the quality of individual contributions and the group draft—these early components do not receive detailed marker feedback. By June 23, the Group submits the Final 2500-3500 word usability report, plus letter of transmittal, executive summary, references, and appendices.

5%   Group Participation (Individual)   Survey: June 26
Quantity, quality, and timeliness of group contributions, based on 1) the Group Report's "Author Credits" appendix, 2) confidential self- and peer-evaluations of group members' participation, 3) the instructor's observation of Group collaboration areas on Desire2Learn, and other relevant communications and observations with the instructor. See "Group Policies" below.

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. Detailed assignment guidelines will be available on the course website. It is the student's responsibility to keep a backup copy of each submitted assignment.

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

Policy for Late Assignments

Deadlines: All assignments are due online by 11:59PM Mountain Standard Time (MST) on their stated due date. Of course, you may submit work early at your convenience.

Grace period: For all assignments except quizzes, a submission grace period of 24 hours (until 23:59MST the next day) is allowed for technical difficulties, short-term illness, or scheduling challenges. This is not a deadline extension. For technical difficulties, see instructions for alternative submission in the "Assignment Submission" section below. Quizzes do not have a grace period.

Late penalties: No late penalty will apply to assignments submitted in the grace period noted above. After the grace period has expired, 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 must be submitted to the instructor in order to request a reduction or waiver of late penalties.

Assignment Submission

Do NOT email assignments. Submit all assignments to the assignment's designated area in Desire2Learn.

Submit all assignment files only in .doc or .docx format. This is the file type that markers use to provide feedback in the margins. Use the following format for naming your files. Instead of spaces, use hyphens:

- FORMAT: 363-assignment-lastname-firstname-.docx

- 363-IndividualReport-Brown-Sarah.docx
- 363-GroupReport-JonesT-NgoF-CarterB.doc (group assignment)

Identify your Group Report file as the DRAFT or the FINAL version:

- 363-GroupReport-JonesT-NgoF-CarterB-DRAFT.docx
- 363-GroupReport-JonesT-NgoF-CarterB-FINAL.docx

Verify your submission: After submitting your assignment, re-enter the assignment area to download and re-open your file(s) from Desire2Learn. It is the student's responsibility to verify successful upload and the intended version of the document. If a corrupted, empty or incorrect file is uploaded, you may receive a zero (0) or a late penalty.

Personal backup copy: It is the student's responsibility to save work often and to keep a secure, personal backup copy of each final submitted assignment. Consider using a free account on DropBox or Box.com to store your backup files where they can be reliably date-stamped and accessed or shared online.

Emergency alternative submission methods: If it is temporarily not possible to submit assignments normally via Desire2Learn due to technical difficulty, you may submit files by using one of the two alternative submission methods before the end of the assignment's grace period:

OPTION 1: Email your file attachments to the instructor's "COMS 363 Emergency alternative submission" folder on Box.com at upload.COMS363.v5w0oh7cyd@u.box.com . You will receive an email confirmation that your submission has been uploaded to the secure folder. As soon as Desire2Learn is accessible, resubmit your assignment normally AND leave the instructor and marker a note about using this method.

OPTION 2: Print out your assignment and submit it to the Communication and Culture department office, making sure your name, the course number, and instructor's name are on the title page. A daytime assignment drop box is available in Social Sciences 320, where a date stamp and sign-in sheet is provided for your use. An after-hours drop box is also available near the door of SS320, where assignments will be removed the following morning, stamped with the previous day's date, and placed in the instructor's mailbox. As soon as Desire2Learn is accessible, resubmit your assignment normally AND leave the instructor and marker a note there regarding your use of this submission method.

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 word count focuses on the student's sentences within the body of the document, internal headings, short quotations, and in-text citations. *Do NOT count words in long quotations (over 40 words), title page, table of contents, tables & figures, captions, footnotes, reference lists, 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 word counter: http://www.textfixer.com/tools/online-word-counter.php

Group Policies: Students will be assigned to Groups of 4-6 students at the beginning of term. Groups work together on research, data analysis, draft review, and writing for the Group Report assignment, and their Group Participation is also assessed. Groups must use Desire2Learn to securely share and archive group files, messages, meeting notes, and other data. The instructor has access to monitor and contribute to Group areas. Each group must ensure that workload is distributed fairly among members and that all have had a chance to contribute to and review the Draft and to approve the Final version before submission. Normally all members receive the same Group Report grade. If groups experience serious dysfunction or challenges they have not been able to resolve, contact the instructor in a timely manner.

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 Desire2Learn. However, keep your email address and ID 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

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, as outlined below:

- Major writing 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. Scores between two letter grades (A-/A) may also be given, and are likewise converted to points based on their midpoint. For example, B/B- will be converted to 75. However, F grades will be converted to zero (0) and A+ grades will be converted to 100%.

- If an assignment is given points rather than a letter grade, its equivalent percentage will be used in final grade calculations. A score of 7.5 out of 10 for Participation will be considered 75 in calculations.

Grading timeline: Normally, assignments will be graded, marked and returned on Canvas within two weeks (14 days), with some exceptions. A grading period may be extended to accommodate a holiday. Any assignment submitted late may be returned later than normal. Students are expected to learn from markers' feedback to improve the quality of later assignments.

Grade concerns and appeals: All concerns about grades, marking, assignment expectations, late penalties, 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 verifiable documentation of serious obstacles outside of one's control.

Revision option: Students who earn F, D or D+ on the Individual Report may appeal to revise it. Email the instructor within 5 days of receiving your grade and propose your revision strategy. If revision is permitted, the new version will be due June 13. The instructor will *average* the original and new scores.

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.

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

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. 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 provide adequate detail about research ethics considerations in all reports of research activity, as outlined in assignment instructions. Failure to adequately address ethical considerations will result in an F grade until students address omissions in their assignments. Ethics forms and information specific to COMS 363 will be posted on Desire2Learn. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see The Faculty of Arts Research Ethics site: http://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/research/research-ethics and the 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, messages and emails submitted under your name will not be used in research unless you give consent to a formal request for such use.

Schedule of Lectures and Readings

The course Calendar and week-by-week learning guides will be provided on Desire2Learn.