Communication Studies (COMS) 363 - Section 01
Professional and Technical Communication
Winter 2014
An on-line course on the blackboard system: https//blackboard.ucalgary.ca

Instructor:	Lisa Stowe
Office Location:	SS206
Office Phone:	403 220 4840
E-Mail:	lstowe@ucalgary.ca
Web Page:	NA
Office Hours:	NA

Course Description

COMS 363 is an introduction to professional and technical communication. **Note that this section of the course will be offered entirely online. There are no tutorials or formal classes for this course.**

This class takes a rhetorical approach to understanding professional and technical communication. Emphasis is placed on how workplace communication is situated within distinct organizational or corporate cultures as well as broader socio-cultural contexts.

This class will not provide you with a cookie cutter approach to technical and professional writing. Rather it will help you develop general concepts and tools to help you make sense of the various workplace writing situations. Emphasis will be placed on audience and genre analysis to help determine the best possible technical or professional structure. COMS 363 will help you develop general concepts and tools to help you make sense of workplace writing situations as they arise.

Additional Information

***Please note:** Put COMS 363 in your subject line so that I don't miss your message. Please read the entire course outline for valuable tips and advice on how to manage an online course.

Marking Groups and Markers: There are no face-to-face tutorials in this class. However, all students will be in one of eight marking groups on Blackboard. These groups will be assigned at random after the drop/add date, but I may move some students later in the term either to balance marking loads or to bring together students who wish to collaborate on the final project. If you wish to change marking groups, please make your request as soon as possible. **If you wish to work as a group you must form your group by January 31 and submit your group members names to me.**

Objectives of the Course

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.

Internet and electronic communication device information: NA

Textbooks and Readings:

Tebeaux, E. and Dragga, S. (2012). The Essentials of Technical Communication. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

It is advised that you obtain the most recent edition of the text since the quizzes were created from that particular edition.

Other readings and resources are located on Blackboard. Relevant readings are identified throughout the clickable schedule.

Technical requirements & support:

TO DO (1): Before the course begins, please visit the e-learning student help page: http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/elearn/blackboard/students Here, you will find helpful resources for Blackboard plus links to information about obtaining an IT account, changing your password, and updating your e-mail address in the system. Note that you must have an IT account in order to access Blackboard. If you already have an @ucalgary.ca e-mail address, you have the necessary IT account in place. Once you enter the Blackboard platform, check out the help resources located under the HELP button on the menu. As you'll see, these help resources include a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs). If you run into problems, please check this area first.

TO DO (2): Before the course begins, 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 (at the link provided on the e-learn page. If you neglect to update your e-mail address in the system, you will miss important messages related to this online 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 and returned course work as messages bounced back to the instructor because of full e-mailboxes will normally not be resent. (Returned messages because of full e-mail boxes tend to be a particular problem with Hotmail accounts.)

TO DO (3): If you do not have PowerPoint and MS Word on your computer, please visit the Microsoft download centre to download the PowerPoint and Word viewers: http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/Search.aspx?displaylang=en

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 are using Microsoft Word 2007, please use the save as feature to save all files as .doc (2003-style) rather than .docx (2007-style). Markers may have difficulty reading .docx files.

If you encounter technical problems, please contact the IT support desk (phone 220-5555 or e-mail itsupport@ucalgary.ca).

Assignments and Evaluation

I. Online Quiz Assignments Close Dates and Weight:

4 quizzes at 5% each (20% of final mark)

Quiz 1 (on Ch. 1, 2, 3, & 7) Closed: January 31

Quiz 2 (on Ch. 4, 5 & 6) Closed: February 14

Quiz 3 (on Ch. 8 & 9) Closed: March 7

Quiz 4 (on Ch. 10, 11) Closed: March 21

Quizzes: Quizzes are open-book and are to be done individually without collaboration. Quizzes will remain open from the beginning of the semester until the due dates posted above. Once quizzes are closed, they will not be reopened. Please be reminded that some quiz due dates are the same due dates as submitted assignments so use your time wisely.

Ensure that you complete all quizzes before they close as the instructor will not hear any appeals to re-open these quizzes.

II. Submitted Assignments with weight, due dates, length and objectives. More details about the assignments can be found in the assignment guidelines posted on Blackboard:

Reading Response (Individual Assignment)
Weight: 10%
Due: January 24

Length: 750-900 words

Objective: Students will understand the complexities of shifting genres as they write a reading response to the article Andre and Schneider (2004),"The Transition from Academic to Workplace Writing: Students Talk about their Experiences." Responses should reflect on students' experiences in writing for academic and workplace audiences.

Project proposal (Group or Individual Assignment)
Weight: 15%
Due: February 14

Length: 4-6 pages (7 absolute maximum) excluding appendices

Objective: Students must submit a project proposal which describes the focus of the proposed usability study of a website. The proposal will explain the criteria for analysis, offer a short literature review section that provides a scholarly overview of the theories and concepts that will be used in the report, set out proposed research methods in some detail and show that ethics considerations are taken into account before any primary research is conducted. Drafts of interview questions or survey questions are included.

Online Collaboration Recommendation Memo (Individual Assignment)
Weight: 15%

Due: March 14

Length: 750-1000 words

Objectives: Students will write a memo recommending an online collaborative project management system to bring a modest amount of secondary research to bear on a problem and to formulate a reasoned position based on that secondary research. Students will gain an understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of collaborating online.

PowerPoint presentation & notes (Group or Individual Assignment)
Weight: 15%
Due: March 28

Length: 12-15 slides (15 maximum) plus speaker notes

Objectives: This assignment will test students skill at reducing their report findings to a concise presentation that would effectively highlight the key points for an intended audience. Assessment will be based on slide design as well as slide content. Speaker notes must complement the slides, not replicate the material on the slides.

Final report (with letter of transmittal) (Group or Individual Assignment) Weight: 25%
Due: April 11

Length: 15-18 single spaces pages (20 pages max, excluding appendices)

Objectives: By completing this assignment students will use both primary and secondary research techniques to gather material for a professional report and then prepare a report using accepted conventions of report layout. There is an expectation that students will bring together the past 13 weeks of instruction on audience, readability and style.

All assignments must be completed or a grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

Assignment Information and FAQ

I. Assignment submission, return, & important technical information

- Please submit all assignments (including the quizzes) via the links provided in the ASSIGNMENTS area of Blackboard. (Submitted assignments will show up as a ! symbol in your marker's grade book.) **Do not email your assignments or use the drop box.**

- Note that browser compatibility issues may interfere with assignment uploading. Firefox 4 or 5 and Internet Explorer 9 are not supported browsers. Supported browsers for Blackboard 8 are listed here: http://kb.blackboard.com/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=57442326

To downgrade Firefox to 3.6, get the file here: http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/all-older.html

- Keep a copy of all assignments submitted. Consider using Box.net to store assignment copies so that they can be accessed from anywhere.

- Normally, assignments will be returned within two weeks. Retrieve your marked assignment via the assignment submission portal.

Assignment file formats & file names

- Please use .docx and .pptx (Microsoft 2007) files unless your marker prefers a different file format. A good alternative is .rtf file format.

- Avoid .pdf files as markers cannot add comments to them; however, you may submit a .pdf copy of your final report along with a .docx or .doc version, so your marker can check the .pdf in case formatting appears to be lost in translation using other formats.

- To minimize the chance of a file mix-up, please use the following format for naming your files: 363 proposal Smith, Ngo, & Carter.doc

II. A note on word count:

A 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:

- 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.

- 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, no assignment, however brilliant otherwise, would receive a clear A.

- Note that the report assignment specifically allows for more than the suggested page length if it contains bulky visuals. Otherwise the same rules apply to pages as well as number of words.

- Don't try to keep down to the required length by using narrow margins and teeny font. Your markers have all seen that trick before.

III. Due dates and late penalties

- Assignments are due on Friday at 4:30pm MST. There will be a two day grace period up until Sunday, at 4:30pm MST. If submitted after the grace period the

assignment will be considered late and will be deducted one half letter grade per day. So if you score an A on an assignment but are three days late submitting that assignment, you will receive a final grade of B-.

- Please note that if you submit an assignment during the grace period then the makers will also have a grace period and your assignment will be marked after all other assignments submitted by the Friday deadline are marked and returned. If you require an extension you must submit a 'request for extension memo' to the instructor, Lisa Stowe, before the deadline of Friday at 4:30.

IV. Grade Appeals

- Students (or groups) who earn a D or D+ on the reading response, proposal, recommendation memo, powerpoint presentation or final report may revise and resubmit the assignment to the instructor (by email) **within 15 days**. Successful revisions may earn a grade increase to the C- level.

- **Within 15 days** of the return of a marked assignment, students may request a reassessment of an assignment. Such requests should be directed to the instructor (by email), they should be professional in tone formatted as a memo, and they should clearly explain the grounds for the reassessment. (The tone should reflect the tone one would take if requesting a similar request of a supervisor in a workplace environment.) Note that grades may be increased or lowered on appeal. As explained in the University Calendar (p. 46), reassessed grades may be further appealed at the department level **within 15 days**.

V. Group project option

- The proposal, PowerPoint and final report may be done individually or in a group of up to four members. Let me know who you are working with so that I can make sure you end up in the same marking group and are all marked by the same marker.

- 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 (and indicate what marking section you are in). 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.

Grading System

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

	Grading Scale
A+	96-100
A	90-95.99
A -	85-89.99
B+	80-84.99
B	75-79.99
B-	70-74.99
C+	65-69.99
C	60-64.99
C-	55-59.99
D+	53-54.99
D	50-52.99
F	0-49

Where a grade on a particular assignment is expressed as a letter grade, it will normally be converted to a number using the midpoint of the scale. That is, A- would be converted to 87.5 for calculation purposes. F will be converted to zero.

Further notes and advice on course work:

- Because there are no formal classes in this course students sometimes have trouble organizing themselves throughout the semester. Use the clickable schedule to keep you on track.

- Aim to manage your time effectively. Try to schedule at least five hours every week for reading and work on this course. Break your assignments down into manageable chunks and set a schedule for completing them. Your success in this online course will likely be a measure of your ability to be a well-organized and self-directed learner, a skill that you will bring with you into the workplace.

- If you have questions, don't hesitate to e-mail the instructor. **Do not email the marker!** I have asked markers to refer all general questions to me in order to ensure that everyone gets the same answer.

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

Please note: If your class is held in the evening, the Registrar's Office will make every attempt to schedule the final exam during the evening; however, there is NO guarantee that the exam will NOT be scheduled during the day.

Policy for Late Assignments

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late.

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). As one consequence**, students should identify themselves on all written work by placing their name on the front page and their ID number. Also you will be required to provide a piece of picture identification in order to pick up an assignment or look at a final exam from SS320 after classes have ended.**
For more information see also 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://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

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.

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. 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 regarding how to document sources.

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 Student Accessibility Services (220-8237, http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/) 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.

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. This course has course based ethics approval and the ethics forms are located on blackboard. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see

The Department of Communication and Culture Research Ethics site: http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/ethics

or the University of Calgary Research Ethics site:

http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/cfreb

Schedule of Lectures and Readings

Please check out the clickable schedule on Blackboard for a more detailed breakdown of the semester activities.