

ENGL 306: Introduction to
Professional Writing

Fall 2003: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 3:00-4:15pm, HEAV 227

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Required Materials

Texts

Writing Workplace Cultures. Jim Henry Southern Illinois University Press 2000. 0809323206

Design of Everyday Things. Donald Norman. Basic Books. 2003. 0465067107

Professional Writing and Rhetoric. Tim Peeples. Longman. 2003. 0-321-09975-3

Learning From Strangers: Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies. Weiss. Free Press. 1995. 0684823128

Materials

Please be sure to make numerous backup copies of all your work on different media.

I strongly recommend purchasing a USB Drive (called “thumb” or “jump” drive – 16 mb should be fine).

Course Description

In English 306, Introduction to Professional Writing, students study texts, contexts and concepts important to the practice of professional writing and produce documents for both paper and digital distribution. While the course addresses practical skills such as how to write memos, emails, proposals and reports, class discussion focuses on rhetoric, ethics, and information design. As professional writers, you will be expected to analyze organizations and institutions to develop effective communicative practices. Therefore, the class is organized with an eye towards future action: While you will be reading what others have done, we will be developing strategies for communicating effectively. Students will use appropriate communication technologies.

One fundamental question addressed in this class is: What do professional writers *do*? Through the course, students will read definitions of professional & technical writing from academic and professional perspectives. Students research and report on the variety of experts who call themselves professional writers. And students create a variety of documents in genres common in professional and technical writing. Reading and writing assignments have been designed to help students gain greater insight into the issues and challenges of professional writing in a variety of workplace contexts.

Assignment Descriptions

What is Professional Writing Memo

Following discussion during the first day of class, students will produce two page memos defining Professional Writing as students currently understand the term. The memo should describe what you believe your major and its goals to be, what you expect to get from your course work, as well as describe some opportunities you expect will open for you once you complete your college education. The memo is worth 5% of your final grade, and will be collected but not returned until later in the semester. Memos are due August 26.

Analyzing User-Centered Design

Part 1: Analyze the Design of a Device (Sep 2)

Using Donald Norman’s *Design of Everyday Things* as a sourcebook, students will first describe a small device

(cellphone, clock radio, PDA, iPod, etc) and articulate the device’s conceptual model. Map the device’s interface: how does it work, and does it do its work well? Then analyze the design of the device: Is there a gulf of execution or evaluation? If the device is poorly designed, what needs to be changed for them to be more usable? If the device is well designed, what separates it from other devices? 10%

Assignment	Value	Due Date
What is Professional Writing Memo	5%	Aug 26
Analyzing User-Centered Design		
Analyze Design of a Device	10%	Sep 2
Analyze Design of a Space	10%	Sep 9
CPTSC Materials		
Group Proposal	10%	Sep 21
Conference Materials	10%	Sep 28
Mentoring Report	10%	Oct 23
Interview Report		
Interview Proposal	10%	Nov 6
Progress Report	10%	Nov 13
Final Interview Report	20%	Dec 2
In-class Conference	5%	Dec 7-9

Part 2: Analyze the Design of a Space (Sep 9)

Using Donald Norman's *Design of Everyday Things* as a sourcebook, describe a space specifically created for the dissemination of information. Map an office, store, library, or other appropriate space designed to encourage human beings to create, organize and share information. Map the space: describe how different people use the space, and evaluate how it supports or hinders the sharing of information. Then analyze the design of the space: Is there a gulf of execution or evaluation? If the space is poorly designed, what needs to be changed? If the space is well designed, what separates it from other similar spaces? (10%)

CPTSC Materials

On October 8, the Professional Writing Program will host its annual teaching showcase during the 2004 annual meeting of the CPTSC, The Council on Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication. The showcase will need a number of paper-based communicative artifacts (such as signs, programs, memos, and posters) for use in the conference space. The class will design these texts with consideration for their users and context of display. Using Norman's idea of user-centered design, the class will break into groups and create multiple versions of displays, signs, documents, etc as needed. A group proposal with draft designs is due Sep 21 (10%) and final materials for each group will be due Sep 28 (10%). Apply what you have learned about effective user-centered design.

Mentoring Program Report

Some time before October Break, you will have an opportunity to meet graduate students studying professional writing. They have an interest in your education and expectations for the professional writing major, and will be asking you questions about your studies. You also have a responsibility to find out about them, their studies and their interests. Before Oct 23, submit a 2 page description of your interaction with your mentor; describe the person, their interests, and their path into the field of professional writing. They will also be seeking information from you: be as helpful as possible in their search to understand professional writing students. Consider this practice for the forthcoming interview. (10%)

Interview Report

Using Weiss as a guide, each student will find a professional writer in the Lafayette area to interview (I will provide some leads for interview subjects), write a set of interview questions, contact the person, perform the interview, and then write up the interview findings in a final interview report. Evaluation takes place at three stages of the interview report project:

Proposal: The proposal, worth 10% of the semester grade, is a shorter (2-3 page) document stating who will be interviewed, describing the organization with which the subject is affiliated, and announcing when and where the interview is scheduled to take place. The proposal must include a draft version of the interview questions. Students will work together to improve interview questions and tips, but each student conducts her own interview. The proposal is due Nov 6.

Progress Report: The progress report, worth 10% of the semester grade, is a longer narrative written immediately following the interview. Transcriptions of questions and answers are required. At least four items should appear: 1) an extended account of the interview, including location, time, and circumstances, 2) description of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee, 3) impressions of the interview, as well as 4) ideas for improving interview technique. Due Nov 13.

Final Report: The final interview report, worth 20% of the semester grade, is a long formal report, and must include a detailed description of the interview and at least two appendices. These appendices include the original question list and the interview transcript. The report should include both a description of the interview as well as an analysis of the interview. The interview report is written primarily to be read by other members of the class. Students are expected to "repurpose" materials from the proposal and progress report. More information regarding the interview and report will be given in class. The final interview report is due Dec 2, and no student will receive a grade for the class without submitting a complete final interview report.

In-class Conference

Finally, after reading 5-7 interview reports, students will prepare a five minute presentation defining professional writing as a major, a profession, or as a course of study. Examples of professional writers can be drawn from interview reports, mentoring, the CPTSC conference, and/or course readings. How well prepared are you to take advantage of opportunities in professional writing? In the major at Purdue? How well have the course readings prepared you for your future workplace? What do you still need to know in order to become a professional writer? Define the role you are most likely to play in an organization as a professional writer. Prepare your remarks with two audiences in mind: your classmates in 306 as well as for the next class of 306 students: what should prospective professional writing students know about the major, and how will you and they make the most of the opportunities available to them at Purdue and beyond? Prepare 5 minutes of material and create a visual for sharing in class. PowerPoint is a good program to use, but do not feel limited to this one tool: your visual may be but does not have to be digital.

Calendar

Week	Dates	Topic	Deadlines & Reading Assignment
1	Aug 24, 26	Introduction: What is Professional Writing?	Memo, "What is Professional Writing?" Due Aug 26 Read Norman, Introduction, Chapters 1,2,3 for Aug 31
2	Aug 31, Sep 2	User-centered Design: Audience as User	Analyze Design of a Device Due Sep 2 Read Norman, Chapters 4,5,6,7 for Sep 7
3	Sep 7, 9	Designing for Use: Human-made Machines	Analyze Design of a Space Due Sep 9 Read Peeples, Part 1 for Sept 16
4	Sep 14, 16	Situating Symbolic Action: Reading Context, Writing Texts	Read Peeples, Part 2 for Sept 21
5	Sep 21, 23	Information Design: Theories & Methods of Design	CPTSC Materials Draft Due Sep 21 Read Peeples, Part 3 for Sept 28
6	Sep 28, 30	Information Architecture: Managing the User Experience	CPTSC Materials Due Sep 28 Read Peeples, Part 4 for Oct 5
7	Oct 5, 7	Preparing for CPTSC Conference	Read Weiss, Chapters 1,2,3,4 for Oct 14
8	Oct 12	October Break – No Class	No class
	Oct 14	Communicating Ethical Action: Constraints, Boundaries, Questions	Read Weiss, Chapters 5,6,7 plus appendices for Oct 19
9	Oct 19, 21	Designing For, Designing With: Rhetorics of Design	Mentoring Interaction Memo Due Oct 23 Read Henry, Introduction, Chapters 1,2 for Oct 26
10	Oct 26, 28	Designing Information for the Web: Virtual Objects in the Real World	Read Henry, Chapters 3,4,5 for Nov 2
11	Nov 2, 4	Rhetoric, Art, Science: People, Technologies, Constraints	Interview Proposal Due Nov 6 Finish Henry for Nov 9
12	Nov 9, 11	Technologies in Context: Design in Society	Interview Progress Report Due Nov 13 Review Norman for Nov 16
13	Nov 16, 18	Mapping: Representing Space, Constructing Relationships	Interview Report Draft Due Nov 18 Read Peeples, Chapter 8, "Writing Yourself into Professional Writing and Rhetoric" for Nov 30
14	Nov 23	Drafting the Final Report	Review class email
	Nov 25	Thanksgiving	No Class
15	Nov 30, Dec 2	Opportunities for Professional Writers	Interview Report workshop Nov 30, Interview Report Due Dec 2
16	Dec 7, 9	Defining Professional Writing: Classroom Conference on the Status of PW	Conference Presentation Due Dec 7-9

Course Policies

Attendance

You are expected to be in class every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon and to participate in online discussion throughout each week. Each missed class is significant: communicate with the instructor regarding any missed class time. After two absences, student grades will be impacted. Please discuss multiple absences with the instructor.

Communication

Early in the semester, you will be asked to demonstrate your ability to:

- Access to your Career Account and use your @purdue.edu email address,
- Send and receive email messages to the class list, email and open attachments, and follow email decorum,
- Check the course calendar before the beginning of each class, and
- Back-up your work via your home directory, disks, and/or email attachments to yourself.

Online Discussion and Classroom Participation

Email and online discussion allow students to pursue topics and ideas outside of class time. Every student is required to participate in online discussion. Online and classroom participation will be evaluated as 5% of the final grade. I read many posts to class discussion. However, I try to limit my participation so students have an opportunity to develop their own understanding of the material. Please keep in mind that online discussion is an extension of classroom space: post material you feel is appropriate for classroom discussion. Generally, if you check email a few times each week and post questions and concerns as they occur to you during your preparation for class, you will maintain an appropriate level of participation. Do not hesitate to ask questions online: chances are that someone in class has the same question, and often someone has an answer. Sometimes the question you are asking is far more complicated than you had imagined. There is no single "right" way to have an online discussion. You must participate in the online discussion in order to receive a grade in this course.

Due Dates and Grading

Please submit assignments when they are due. Late work is not acceptable. While I am happy to discuss grading practices and policies and will do my best to explain why students receive certain evaluations, grades are rarely changed. Please visit me in my office during office hours, and use email to contact me between class meetings.

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty is a serious crime. If you are suspected of academic dishonesty, you may be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students who may pursue disciplinary action. Forms of academic dishonesty include: Collusion - lending your work to another person to submit as his or her own; Fabrication - deliberately creating false information on a works cited page; and Plagiarism - the presentation of another person's work as your own, whether intentional or not. Please read and familiarize yourself with Purdue's student guide to academic integrity located at: [<http://www.purdue.edu/odos/administration/integrity.htm>].

The Writing Lab

The Writing Lab (located at 226 Heavilon Hall) offers a variety of writing resources for all students and teachers at Purdue, including half-hour tutorials, workshops, handouts and books, public use computers, a collection of tapes and software for writers of English as a Second Language (ESL), and an inexhaustible supply of animal crackers. Many of these resources can be accessed from the Online Writing Lab (OWL) at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>. For more information, call 494-3723.

The Digital Learning Collaboratory (DLC)

The DLC (located in the lower level of Hicks Undergraduate Library) offers an active learning environment with a number of resources that you can access to help create multimedia projects. As a student, you can check out equipment, use the high-speed Macs and PCs, learn new software, or reserve space to work collaboratively on a class project. For more information, go to <http://www.lib.purdue.edu>, send e-mail to DLC@purdue.edu, or call 494-3751.

Adaptive Programs

The Adaptive Programs division of the Office of the Dean of Students (ODOS) can arrange for assistance, auxiliary aids, or related services if you think a temporary or permanent disability might prevent you from gaining access to departmental or university resources listed above. Contact ODOS at 494-1247 or [www.purdue.edu/odos/] with any individual concerns.

Non-Discrimination

The instructor will not knowingly infringe anyone's rights and will do his best to maintain access and safety for all students. Raise any concerns during or after class if you feel the classroom environment (whether due to instructor or student action) is hostile or otherwise inappropriate.