Comm 1116 Email Assignment (202510): AI compliant[1]

The following is the scenario for which you will write this term’s big solo assignment (20 marks). Your submission must be a shared file and must include the plan sheet.

You will share in this assignment file to the assignment folder: Big Deal Email Assignment (20 marks). You will not make a separate submission on the due date. Just take your hands off the keyboard before the deadline and your instructor will grade the file that you have been working on and on which they can check your edits and progress.

You are, of course, welcome to use AI to help with edits, so you will need to provide an AI acknowledgement in this work file. For this acknowledgement, you do not need to produce every prompt and result; just provide a paragraph description of how, or whether, you used AI on this assignment (See the Assignment Sheet for how to do so). You will not lose marks for using AI, but I want to know how AI is being used and what sort of work it produces – if only to satisfy my own curiosity. Thanks.

You work for BlackBox Code Werx, a medium-sized programming outfit that has recently aspired to grow quickly by applying for contracts with the government and large companies, mostly to develop operations and control software. But it’s not going well.

It’s Tuesday morning (Feb. 04) and your boss, Mike P., comes into your office. He looks upset.

Boss: We didn’t get it!

You: What’s that?

Boss: The contract to build the control system at the new refinery in Alberta. I mean, I know it’s a bit out of our area of expertise, but c’mon, that’s the seventh proposal we’ve submitted without success. Those things take a lot of time to put together, and that means a lot of money.

You: Oh, I know. We’re constantly pulling our team leads away from their projects to work on these proposals. They’re getting a little tired of it. I once read somewhere that if you’re not winning a third of your proposal submissions, you are either not applying for the right projects, in that you don’t know how to do what you are proposing to do, or you are writing bad proposals that no one wants to read or that people have trouble understanding.

Boss: Hm.

You: What? Oh no. You’ve got that look in your eyes. You’re going to make me go on some wild goose chase[2], aren’t you?

Boss: No, not at all. I just want you to find out which it is. We are not out of our element. We could have helped PetroCan develop that operations and control software. So, we must not be writing proper proposals. I need you to meet with the techies, HR, and the accounts manager to establish what we can do to improve our chances.

You: [deep sigh]: I’ll get right on it.

Boss: That’s the spirit. I’ve got a tee time,[3] but let me know as soon as you have a plan. Let me know what you’re thinking of doing about this and then we’ll decide how to proceed.

It’s now several days later. You have called a meeting with the head of HR, Ann K., one of your programmers whom you consider a particularly good writer, Bill C., and the accounts manager, Kim S. You had asked them to review some of the past failed proposals and to identify problems and suggest solutions. Btw, you are a project team lead; you just don’t have a project right now.

You: So, what have you come up with?

Bill: Well, one thing is for sure. I don’t want to be stuck being the company’s proposal writer. I don’t really enjoy it; I want to code. But it’s also not a good use of company money. I’m worth more coding than writing. I think we should hire a technical writer. Aside from these proposals that we seem to be constantly writing, they could also handle our SRED[4] [pronounced “shred”] applications, other tax-exemption applications, and so on. I really think there’d be enough work for a writer. It would free up the programmers to do what they’re best at and what makes us money.

Ann: Why not just bring in a consultant when we need one? Wouldn’t that save money?

Bill: A consulting writer will charge at least $100/hr, which comes to about $200,000 per year. I’m pretty sure a full-time employed tech writer would make a lot less. So even if they weren’t fully booked at first, we’d still save money.

You: Also, if they were with us full time, they’d get used to our way of doing things, which would make them more productive.

Ann: Good point. It would also make our documents sound a lot more consistent if they were produced by one person. There’d be a single voice, as it were, in our documentation.  
  
 Of course, another problem with our documents is that they don’t look good. They’re just not designed properly. If part of what we do is to design GUIs, I feel the products we send to clients or potential clients should look, well, designed. What do you think? We could get the writer to create a nice template for all our stuff.

You: Well, a writer isn’t necessarily a designer. We could look into hiring a graphic design company to put together a brand package. Our logo doesn’t suck completely, so we could still use that. But we might get our business cards redone and have them design a document template that incorporates the logo and the logo colours into the document.

Kim: And please, please, please, can we get a professional looking title page. And a standard, attractively formatted qualification section that lists all our accomplishments? We’ve developed and are maintaining some really cool projects. We need a sort of sales package that I can hand out to potential clients or that we can append to our proposals. I’m thinking of something of an infographic on each project that gives a quick overview of our wins.

Ann: Oh, that sounds great!

You: Bill?

Bill: You want me to pull together information for those infographics, am I right?

You: If we get approval from Mike [boss], yes. We’ll have to ask him for permission to invest that kind of time, and, of course, money. He’s ambitious but can be a bit tight-fisted.[5] But at first . . .

Bill: Meeting minutes!

You: What?

Bill: Sorry. Just had a thought; a writer could also produce our meeting minutes.[6] You know how nobody ever wants to take notes during meetings and produce the meeting minutes and if they do, there are always questions about whether they’re accurate or complete. A writer could attend our meetings and generate the minutes. I always get stuck doing them. I hate them! It’s really hard to keep notes while being expected to participate in the meeting and then I have to spend at least an hour putting together the minutes, when I should be doing some coding or something.

Kim: We do hold a lot of meetings.

Everyone groans in acknowledgement.

You: Soooo?

Kim: Some of my clients say that they work from a corporate style guide. Would it help if we had one? I mean the writer can’t do all the writing that needs doing. And it looks pretty bad when we use US spelling when writing a proposal to the Canadian government or company. A style guide would make sure that all our communication is consistent – even such simple things as whether we call it “backend operations” or “back-end operations” with or without a hyphen.

Ann: A style guide would also streamline onboarding.[7] We wouldn’t have to train people individually on our comm processes and standards. They’d have a manual to refer to. That would save a lot of time for the team leads. . .

Bill: And it would reduce errors for the writer or team leads to correct.

Ann: I also think it would foster better communication all around and a stronger company culture. It would take some time to put together, not just the writers, but also the team leads whom the writer would have to consult. So, this is not a cheap item, but they’ve been shown to produce a lot of good in terms of savings long term, company morale, and support of a brand identity.

You: Wow, so we’re thinking of hiring a writer, creating a style guide, and getting a professionally branded look?

Bill: Is AI an option though, I mean in terms of the writing? I mean if I know Mike, he likes to save money, like you said. AI is pretty cheap and can do some real work. I’ve used it to help with some of my writing.

Ann: We’ve looked into it quite a bit. AI can do pretty good drafts if you give it a solid structure and content, but it can’t write proposals from scratch. It’s not a subject matter expert; it can’t know what we want to offer, how we would make software work and so on. Some person actually has to decide the content and then has to make sure the output is clear, concise and accurate, especially accurate. When we send a proposal, it forms the basis of our contract with the prospective client. Someone has to make sure the proposal reflects what we are offering to do, how, and by when. Someone has to sign off on it and take final responsibility.

You: That’s always Mike.

Bill: Sure, but he’ll want to read something accurate and complete. He won’t want it full of errors and needing fixes.

You: Right, so AI is always an option for productivity, but it’s just a tool in the tool set; it’s not a stand-alone solution.

Kim: Best thing I ever heard about AI is something along the lines of “you won’t be replaced by AI, but you may be replaced by someone who knows how to use AI.”

You: So, we’re back to proposing to Mike that we hire a writer, get a branded document package put together, and put together a style manual?

All: Yeah. That sounds about right. I think so.

You: All right, I’ll suggest our plan to Mike and see what he thinks.

Please write the email explaining to the boss your plan. You’ll need his approval to proceed, so be clear. He may still have questions, but he shouldn’t be in doubt about what exactly you plan to do.

Please note that this scenario is deliberately simply and repetitively written to aid comprehension and so that you do not over-rely on the text in your own email.

[1] This assignment is deliberately disorganized and to some extent incomplete so that you will have to ferret out the relevant and important information and plan how to sequence it in your email. Sorry. It’s tough but fair.

[2] A "wild goose chase" refers to a futile or pointless pursuit of something that is difficult or impossible to achieve (Thank you, ChatGPT)

[3] A tee time is a specific time when a golfer or group of golfers are scheduled to start their round of golf on a golf course

[4] SRED or SR&ED stands for Scientific Research and Experimental Development tax incentive program that allows Cd’n companies to earn tax credits for doing work on high-tech projects. It’s designed to foster innovation and growth in the tech sector. Software companies who work on approved projects can apply for these credits, but the paperwork is extensive.

[5] A "tight-fisted" person is unwilling to spend money, considered stingy or cheap, and is reluctant to part with even small amounts, essentially holding onto their money very tightly; it's a negative term implying a lack of generosity.

[6] Meeting minutes are the official record of what decisions were made, who was in attendance and all other consequential events that occurred during the board meeting. Key is that minutes accurately record the decisions made at meetings, who has been assigned follow-up actions, to what requirements and by what date. It’s a critical document to ensure that the smart decisions made at meetings lead to productive actions after the meeting. They are generally ‘due’ within 24 hours of the meeting.

[7] Onboarding is a human resources term for the process of introducing a newly hired employee into an organization.

**Plan Sheet**

**Purpose Statement**

I want my reader, who is

To Mike, the boss

**1. Main Idea Statement**

We hire a full-time technical writer to write all our proposals, create a styling guide and create a professional looking title page.

**2. Context**

In the past, a lot of proposals failed due to the inconsistency, and not well-designed writing. These fails costs a lot of time and money, it also sifted team leads’ focus away from programming.

**3. Details**

Main benefit of hiring a technical writer: consistent format, good style (consistent spelling, punctuation, and terminology so it’s more clear and reduce errors), cost efficient,

Side benefit of hiring a technical writer: let the programmer write code (attend our meetings and do the proposals instead of programmers do it, save time, increase productivity),

Rebrand: redesign business card, professional title page, document template that include our logo; benefits: give clients a quick overview of our wins,

**4. Next Step**

Ask for approval, “let me know if you have any more questions”

**Draft 1**

**Draft 2**

**AI Acknowledgement**

**Final Draft**