Project I

Research Paper on Workplace Writing

Our course-opening assignment has you research the role of technical communication in *two* separate careers of your choosing. You will need to track down a professional in each of these fields and ask them about their writing process and the documents they produce on the job. You will supplement this with library and Internet research on each and share what you’ve learned from all of this in a clearly-written, well-organized research report. This project is intended to exercise and solidify basic research and writing skills that are fundamental to the workplace. It is designed to help you:

* Develop an understanding of the scope and importance of written communication in careers that interest you.
* Develop interviewing skills (an exercise in using primary sources).
* Conduct basic library and Internet research (using secondary sources).
* Correspond professionally using e-mail and letters.
* Practice writing and editing for clarity, organizing a report, and properly citing sources within it.

**Your Tasks**

Below are some specific instructions for the assignment. I suggest tackling this in a few steps. We’ll discuss some strategies and our struggles and successes with these in class:

**Step 1**: Choose your careers

Choose two distinct professional occupations that interest you. Focus on careers that would in some way leverage your university education. You’re not expected to know for sure yet what you plan to do for a living, but this report can help you get to better know some of the careers you’re contemplating – and specifically the role that written communication plays in each. Have some fun with this before you hit the job market! Here is a list of career fields to help you consider some of the options out there. There are loads of different jobs within each of these you might pursue for your report:

News Media (reporters and editors)

Environment (natural resource professionals, environmental activists)

Teaching and Academia (pick any field)

Architecture/ Engineering/ Construction

Government & Politics (local, state, national or international)  
Public Health/ Human Services

Military/ National Defense

Advertising

Business (commerce, finance, banking)

Public Safety

Psychology & Social Work

Arts & Entertainment

Food Industry

Transportation

**Step 2**: Track down professionals

Seek out and speak with people working in your two chosen fields. This may seem a little intimidating or complicated, but tracking down and engaging professionals about their work (in one context or another) is an important skill set. Doctors, reporters, engineers, teachers, business owners, sales professionals, and designers – to name just a few – all need to do this. We will discuss early on in class ways to find, reach out to, and interview professionals for your paper. The sooner you get started the better. This will include drafting **e-mails** to your prospective interviewees to introduce yourself and request a time to meet for an interview in person. Hang onto these to include in your appendix. During your interview, you will need to ask them to:

* Describe their job. What do they do?
* Describe the roll writing plays in their work routine.
* Name three specific documents they create on a regular basis.
* Specify the audiences and purposes of these documents.
* Provide you, if possible, with copies of or links to example documents they can share with you. You will need to share an example of at least two per field (so, four total) in your paper’s appendices.
* What percentage of your time in any given week would you estimate you spend on writing and editing tasks?
* What is most challenging about writing for you? How do you handle these challenges?
* How important is writing in your field? Does it matter how well you write? Why?
* What advice would you give about writing and communication to someone new to your career?

You will write a brief thank you **letter** to your interview subjects. Hang onto these as well to include in your report’s appendix.

**Step 3**: Write your paper

Start writing your research report. Don’t wait until you have all your research completed; start drafting your report as you go – sourcing your paper with information from your interviews and also secondary sources. I will go over some excerpts from previous reports in class to give you a sense of how to write this up and I will be happy to go over your evolving drafts in office hours. Below is an ordered list (or a blueprint, if you like) of what you will need to include in the research report:

**Title Page** – This should include a title for your paper, your name, my name, the date, and the name and section of our course.

**Body** – Your paper should be typed, double spaced, on 8 ½” x 11” pages with 1” margins in 12-point Times New Roman font. You will need to number your pages, starting with your introduction. You will need to cite your sources using MLA style. That includes in-text citations a properly formatted bibliography. The body of the paper – the section between the start of your introduction and end of your conclusion – should be between 2,000 and 2,300 words (about 6 ½ to 7 pages) and include the following:

* *An introduction* that makes clear the purpose and structure of the paper to follow. This should include a description of the importance of writing in the workplace. Note why it matters and explain how the examples to follow can help us better understand this.
* *Two sections*, one for each career you describe. We’ll use subheads to label and separate these sections. For example, if your subject is a public health nurse, your subhead would be “Public Health Nurse”. Begin with describing their career. What does a public health nurse do? What role does writing play in their daily workplace routine? Include a list (in a sentence) of some of the key types of documents they deal with. Next, describe in some detail – one at a time – three discrete documents essential to their work. Be sure to note the audience(s) and purpose(s) of each document as well as the rhetorical situation(s) in which they are used.
* *A conclusion* that reflects on the importance of writing in the workplace in general, and specifically on the careers highlighted in your paper. Consider important similarities and differences in the role writing plays across these professions. What lessons/ conclusions can we draw from it?

**Bibliography** – Your bibliography, in MLA style, must include a minimum of 9 separate sources: two interviews (conducted by you of your professionals), the four example documents in your appendix, a news article, a book, and a peer-reviewed academic article.

**Appendix** – An appendix contains documentation that supports and further informs your report. In this paper, you will need to include in your appendix four example documents – two from each of the professional fields you discuss in the body of your paper. So, for example, if you chose to interview an English professor and noted in your paper that they write lesson plans and peer-reviewed articles, you might include an example of each in your appendix. You need not include multiple pages of each documents. For example, the first page (with an abstract) of a scholarly article would suffice. If your subject wrote a book, you need only include the cover or title page. Additionally, please include in your appendix 1) a copy of one of your original e-mails reaching out to your prospective interview subject and 2) your formal thank-you letter to that subject.

**Due Dates**

**Day 5 (Wed, Sept. 16)** 🡪 Bring a hard copy or electronic copy of your paper to class for peer review.

**Day 8 (Mon, Sept. 28)** 🡪 Upload to Canvas by midnight the final draft of your report (including the appendix with example documents, e-mail and thank-you letter) in pdf format.