Syllabus (tl;dr Version)

Writing for the Professions (76-270), Spring 2021 • v002

Principles

- Writing is about making choices.
- There is no right way to do it, but there are good ways to do it.
- The way to get better is to practice.
- Be mindful of your audience(s).
- Your health is more important than this course.

Projects

- An *Application Package* (résumé and supporting document)
- A *Proposal*
- A set of *Technical Instructions*
- A *Presentation*

Supporting Work

As we go along through the course, we'll have some small assignments that will act as stepping stones toward the larger projects, and a survey of functional genres of writing, from résumés to telegrams.

Context

We are living through a serious pandemic.

This semester is going to be full of surprises and adaptations. You have the agency to make choices about the risks you are willing to accept for your health and safety, and I will do everything I can to support you in doing the work of this class in a way you are able. With that agency comes responsibility, too, for maintaining connection and work ethic. We are a community; we will figure it out.

Instructor: Paul Mazaitis
Email: `pm39@andrew.cmu.edu`
Office: BH 145J
Office Hours: By Appt.

Resources

Student Academic
Success Center:
`https://www.cmu.edu/student-success/`

CMU Pantry:
`https://www.cmu.edu/student-affairs/dean/cmu-pantry/index.html`

CMU Housing:
`https://www.cmu.edu/housing/`

Health Services:
`https://www.cmu.edu/health-services/`

CAPS:
`http://www.cmu.edu/counseling/`

Syllabus

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Student Drop-In Hours:	By Appt.

Overview

Welcome!

Workplace communicators use words and images to connect people with information. To become an effective workplace communicator, you must learn to put ideas on the page across genres and media, and with a keen sense of audience, purpose, contexts, and constraints.

76-270 Writing for the Professions is designed for all undergraduate majors other than English. English majors should take 76-271 Introduction to Professional and Technical Writing.

In this course, you will learn to communicate information effectively, ethically, and responsibly to people with different needs. Our work will take us through a wide range of genres and rhetorical situations that we can find in the workplace. Through homework, lecture, and a lot of in-class activity we will combine theory, methods, and known best practices for connecting to our audience with strategies for communicating with non-experts and navigating novel situations. By the end of the course, through writing, feedback, analysis, reflection, and revision, you will leave with a set of polished exemplars of your ability to communicate nimbly across genres.

This course does not teach a set of 'rules' for successful writing. Contexts and audiences vary! Instead, we'll talk about writing as *choice*, where different choices can lead to different outcomes. Getting comfortable articulating your choices is something we will work on together; active reflection and a curious mind are key traits for success.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you should able to:

Apply methods of textual and rhetorical analysis to identify patterns in professional and technical writing genres, as well as describe the impact of those patterns on readers.

Recognize genres as recurring rhetorical situations, shaped by discourse communities and historical/cultural contexts.

Develop and apply an understanding of how a document's organization, labels, formatting, and overall design strategies contribute to its effectiveness.

Make complex information accessible to non-expert audiences in both oral and written communication contexts.

Improve your writing and develop a polished and professional prose style that varies appropriately according to audience, purpose, and context.

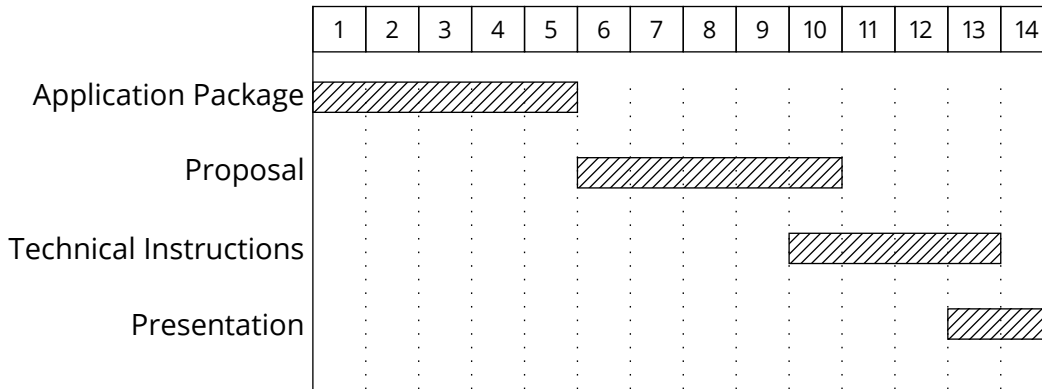Draw on and apply research on how people read and use documents.

Writing collaboratively with others.

Practice reflection and articulate your own writing decisions.

Writing is complex work! As we produce our projects, let's keep these goals in mind, but remember as well: our goal here is not only to make good documents for ourselves, but also to *make ourselves better writers*. We'll get there through practice and reflection, and it's okay if we don't get all the way there on the first try.

Course Plan

We have four large projects:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Application Package	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨									
Proposal						▨	▨	▨	▨					
Technical Instructions										▨	▨	▨		
Presentation													▨	▨

In **Project 1: Application Package**, we will write and design a set of documents (a résumé, paired with a cover letter, personal statement, or LinkedIn summary) that narrates your professional skills for a real-world audience.

In **Project 2: Proposal**, we will identify a real-world or research problem or project that needs decision-makers' support, and write a proposal that details why implementing your idea is worth their time or funds.

In **Project 3: Technical Instructions** we will form small teams to develop and test a set of 'how to' procedural documents that help a real-world user accomplish a task successfully.

In **Project 4: Presentation**, we will develop and deliver an audio clip, adapted and distilled from your Proposal, with the goal of informing our audience and motivating action.

Along the way, we will use **homework assignments** to connect course content to other contexts, topics, and texts. They are also designed to help you build toward your larger project, in terms of developing your content, giving you opportunities for reflection, and breaking your process into smaller, more manageable chunks.

Readings

There is no required textbook for this course! Course materials will be distributed on Canvas as needed.

Schedule

I will be managing the schedule for this course on Canvas: all projects, assignments, and readings due will be available in the Canvas *Syllabus* page for the course. I have tried to give the schedule a useful pattern.

Treat the Canvas schedule as canonical - dates and times may be mentioned in lecture or on assignment prompts, but *the schedule in canvas is authoritative*. I will do my best to make sure everyone is notified when changes need to be made; it is your responsibility to be aware of the schedule, and manage your time accordingly.

Grading

Overview
Your final grade wil be assessed as follows:

Assignment	Grade %
Project 1: Application Package	20%
Project 2: Proposal	20%
Project 3: Technical Instruction	20%
Project 4: Presentation	10%
Homework	10%
Genre of the Week	10%
Community Involvement	10%

Course Grade Composition

Grade	Scale %
A	90%-100%
B	80%-89%
C	70%-79%
D	60%-69%
R	< 60%

Grading Scale

I will be managing grading with Canvas.

Project Grading Rubrics
Projects have extensive rubrics which include grading criteria. The rubrics are available on Canvas.

Homework Grading Rubric

Homework will generally be graded using the 5-point rubric below. At the end of the semester, all homework grades will be averaged to make up 10% of your overall grade.

Points   **Description**

10   Student has engaged deeply with the task, makes critical and novel insights when warranted, and makes connections to things discussed in class. Writing has been proofread; grammatical errors are exceedingly minimal and do not interfere with reader comprehension. Homework is of appropriate length. As a reader, I learned something and would share something from it on social media for having made a novel insight.

You cannot receive full credit if your homework has spelling errors that would have been easily caught with a Spelling/Grammar check tool.

9   Student demonstrates an understanding of core concepts, but could have engaged more deeply with the task or made more of an effort to make novel insights. Connections to things discussed in class could be stronger. Homework is of appropriate length. Any grammatical errors are minimal and do not interfere with reader comprehension. There may be a minor spelling or other mechanical error that indicates this homework was not proofread. As a reader, I did learn something and might share it on social media.

8   The homework makes a potentially promising start and is mostly on topic, but the connections to things discussed in class are minimal or indicate a misunderstanding of one or more core concepts. Any grammatical errors are minimal and do not interfere with reader comprehension. There is some nugget of an idea in here that I might share on social media with a caveat that points out something other readers may find problematic.

7   The homework makes a potentially promising start and is mostly on topic, but the connections to things discussed in class are minimal or indicate a misunderstanding of one or more core concepts. Grammatical errors may exist that begin to interfere with reader comprehension. It is unlikely I would share it on social media.

6   The homework feels off topic, rushed, and/or is incomplete. The author makes dubious assertions or reaches questionable conclusions. Writing errors may be pervasive or interfere with reader comprehension. Homework would not further a class discussion on the topic.

Community Involvement Grading Rubric

Everyone starts with 10 points per criteria for the semester. At the end of the semester, Community Involvement scores will be averaged to make up 10% of your grade.

Criteria	Points	Description
Punctuality	10	Student is always punctual.
	8	Student arrives late to class occasionally.
	6	Student arrives late to class once a week.
	0	Student arrives late to class twice a week.
Preparation	10	Student comes to class prepared, always has drafts for in-class draft review.
	8	Student comes to class mostly prepared, has drafts for in-class draft review.
	6	Student occasionally comes unprepared, lacks a draft for in-class draft review.
	4	Student unprepared two times a week, generally does not bring a working draft.
	0	Student comes to class unprepared almost every day.
Contributions	10	Student contributes thoughtful ideas or questions more than once every class.
	8	Student contributes thoughtful ideas or questions once every class.
	6	Student contributes thoughtful ideas or questions two or three times every week.
	4	Student contributes thoughtful ideas or questions once every week.
	0	Student never contributes thoughtful ideas or questions.
Listening	10	Student always listens when others talk.
	8	Student almost always listens when others talk.
	6	Student usually listens when others talk.
	4	Student sometimes listens when others talk.
	0	Student does not listen when others talk.

The **Contribution** score will reflect your individual overall participation in the course, and the effort that you put in to support your group. Contributions are graded because this is an important skill to develop: you will be in situations where you will need to explain your rationale to clients, so I want to encourage you to use class time to practice this.

Course Policies

Communication (Me)

I will be glad to answer your questions, discuss your work, or respond to your concerns.

Email is the easiest way to reach me. I will try to respond to your email within one business day - hopefully, I'll be quicker than that. My email address[1] is:

    pm39@andrew.cmu.edu

If you want to meet in person, I'm happy to meet in my office or else-where, so long as I have sufficient warning so that I can plan. My office is kind of terrible for group meetings, so we'll use that as a last resort.

Communication (You)

This is a communication course; one of the things that we're generally practicing is effective communication!

You are always welcome to ask questions or offer comments. This is especially true if you are puzzled, or would like to try out an idea:

Asking for help is a sign of strength.

...I am happy to help! If you want to run ideas by friends, family, class mates: that is also okay, but remember that all the work you turn in must be your own.

I am always happy to hear about places where this course could be improved, or where it may not be as effective as it could be.

CMU is a stressful place, and life can be surprising: sometimes, we may find ourselves oversubscribed, and may be struggling to manage. In these cases, my honest and earnest recommendation is:

In times of crisis, increase the level of communication.

...the most valuable resource we have in this course is time, and the sooner we know about crisis, the more options we have.

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[1] Well, one of many, but you should use this one...

Attendance

Attention and participation are key to learning anything. We are in an extraordinary situation this semester with the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, so we should be careful and patient with our adjustments.

You will get the most out of attending this course synchronously, but I understand that there may be circumstances that require asynchronous attendance.

What I will be tracking instead of attendance is participation: activity in online meetings or in other conduits (shared notes, group chat, online discussions, or other mechanisms we find that work for us). Engaging with this material is the path to gaining comfort with it, so I want to offer you every opportunity for that.

When you miss class for something unforeseen, send me an email when you are able, and check in with your classmates about missed work. Let's work together to keep everyone up to date.

Health

Your health is more important than this course.

Learning is always difficult if your body is busy fighting off a cold, flu, or other malady. If you are are not feeling well (especially if you are contagious!): stay home and rest.

If you find yourself in this situation, what I ask of you is this:

Inform me as soon as possible so we can keep on top of any necessary rearrangements, make up work, etc. Emailing me is fine.

Communication is key. All you need to immediately do is keep me posted, and to get better. Once you are on the mend, we can gather and make sure you're caught up.

Please note: the purpose of this policy is to make the immediate situation of any illness more manageable, so you can get better and return to class ready to participate. Please take that to heart and *get better*. We'll figure it out.

Extensions and Late Work

I expect that we are going to have to be flexible with schedules due to the uncertainty of this semester. There may be surprise hotspots in the schedule that affect everyone; they may be developments in your personal life that require you to make decisions about how you spend your time and focus.

I do not need to know personal details; if you need more time, you do not need to tell me why if you are uncomfortable doing so. Instead, I'll remind you that *communication is key*. Please get in touch as soon as possible so we can figure how to get you back on track. One thing I'd like to protect is your ability to engage in the work - I don't mind waiting an extra day if that's the day you needed to really work on the project.

What is critical is that *manage our time well*. We have a finite amount of time in the semester to do this work, and it will become more difficult if we fall behind.

I will accept late work if we've discussed an extension, but I may not be able to comment on it.

Plagiarism

Any work that you submit should be your own work (i.e., not borrowed/copied from any other source, including our assigned readings and your classmates). When using other people's ideas to substantiate your own, please properly cite the original source. I encourage you to consider your classmates' feedback when developing and expressing your design ideas, but those ideas should always be your own.

Any act of cheating or plagiarism will be treated in accordance with Carnegie Mellon's Policy on Academic Integrity, which can be found here:

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http://www.cmu.edu/policies/student-and-student-life/academic
-integrity.html
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I will award no credit to any plagiarized work. Egregious or repeated incidents of plagiarism will result in you failing the class or further penalty.

Incomplete Grades

University policy states the following about Incomplete grades:

Carnegie Mellon students are expected to complete a course during the academic semester in which the course was taken. However, if the instructor agrees, a grade of I (incomplete) may be given when a student, for reasons beyond his or her control, has been unable to complete the work of a course, but the work completed to date is of passing quality and the grade of incomplete provides no undue advantage to that student over other students.

In awarding an I grade, an instructor must specify the requirements for completing the work and designate a default letter grade where no further work is submitted. Students must complete the required course work no later than the end of the following academic semester, or sooner if required by prior agreement. The instructor must record the permanent grade by the last day of the examination period of the following semester, or Enrollment Services will administratively assign the default grade.

For the complete policy, please see:

`https://www.cmu.edu/policies/student-and-student-life/grading.html`

Wellness

Take care of yourself! Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle this semester by eating well, exercising, getting enough sleep, and taking some time to relax. This will help you achieve your goals and cope with stress.

All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. You are not alone. There are many helpful resources available on campus and an important part of the college experience is learning how to ask for help. Asking for support sooner rather than later is often helpful.

If you or anyone you know experiences any academic stress, difficult life events, or feelings like anxiety or depression, we strongly encourage you to seek support. Counseling and Psychological Services (CaPS) is here to help: call **412-268-2922** or visit their website at:

`http://www.cmu.edu/counseling/`

Consider reaching out to a friend, faculty or family member you trust to assist getting connected to the support that can help.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability and have an accommodations letter from the Disability Resources office, I encourage you to discuss your accommodations and needs with me as early in the semester as possible. I will work with you to ensure that accommodations are provided as appropriate. If you suspect that you may have a disability and would benefit from accommodations but are not yet registered with the Office of Disability Resources, I encourage you to contact them at:

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access@andrew.cmu.edu
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Food and Shelter

It's hard to focus on work if you're hungry, or having difficulties with housing. If you are facing challenges securing food, one resource are the good folks at the **CMU Food Pantry**:

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https://www.cmu.edu/student-affairs/dean/cmu-pantry/index.html
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If you are facing challenges with housing, a good resource is **Housing & Residential Education**:

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https://www.cmu.edu/housing/
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Also, please let me know of any housing or food security issues if you are comfortable doing so; I will help if I can.

Recording in On-Line Meetings

If you are attending remotely, you will not be required to enable your camera or your microphone. You may if you wish, but it is my firm position that you should have agency over any recording devices that you introduce to your home.

(I will ask you to update your avatar photo regularly; we may be able to build some narrative that way!)

I recognize that on-line interaction can be difficult; I will try to make sure that there are multiple ways to participate in course meetings.

I may record on-line sessions for later use for students that cannot attend the regular meeting time. I will always announce when recoding is happening, and you will not be required to enable your camera or microphone if being recorded makes you uncomfortable.

Resources

Student Academic Success Center

The Student Academic Success Center focuses on creating spaces for students to engage in their coursework and approach to learning through many group and individual tutoring options. They offer a wide variety of opportunities for students to deepen their understanding of who they are as learner, communicator, and ultimately scholar.

The Student Academic Success Center supports student success by providing academic coaching, subject-specific tutoring, effective communication strategies, accommodations for students with disabilities, and language support for multi-lingual learners.

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https://www.cmu.edu/student-success/
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Food and Housing

If you are facing challenges securing food, a good resource is the **CMU Food Pantry**:

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https://www.cmu.edu/student-affairs/dean/cmu-pantry/index.html
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If you are facing challenges with housing, a good resource is **Housing & Residential Education**:

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https://www.cmu.edu/housing/
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Health and Wellness

For general health care needs, **Health Services** can offer assistance:

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https://www.cmu.edu/health-services/
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Counseling and Psychological Services (CaPS) can offer assistance with stress, depression, or other counseling needs:

Phone: 412-268-2922

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http://www.cmu.edu/counseling/
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