

GWF Meeting Minutes – Workshop Planning

By Vincenzo Coia

Friday, January 16, 10:00am

Attendees: Vincenzo Coia, Andy Leung, Neil Spencer, Estella Qi

Purpose: To plan a practical “writing skills” workshop.

1 Topic Ideas for the workshop

We decided on two possible topics that the workshop can be based on:

1. Writing abstracts (1 page maximum)

- Could be an abstract for a paper, thesis, talk, etc.

2. Writing cover letters (1 page maximum)

- For either academic or industry/government jobs.
- With this topic, we could have a mock “hiring process” during the workshop:
 - Since we can’t teach about writing a “general” cover letter, we could pick 2 job postings (one academic and one industry/government), and ask that students write a cover letter for one of these jobs.
 - * If they choose, students could also bring a cover letter for a job they would like to apply for. If so, they should bring the job posting.
 - Students could also bring their CV to aid in the process.

We also discussed “putting together a portfolio” as a topic, but since this is less about writing skills, we deemed it to be not appropriate.

2 When the workshop would take place

We decided on three possible dates:

1. Wednesday, February 18th (during reading week; Vincenzo has his comprehensive exam sometime this week)
2. Saturday, March 14 (two weeks after the SFU/UBC Joint Seminar)
3. Thursday, April 30 (right after exams are done, and hopefully before people go away)

3 Workshop Agenda

The total workshop length should be about 2.5 hours. Here is the agenda we came up with:

1. Introduction (discuss outline/agenda of the workshop) (~ 10 minutes)
2. Presentation by a faculty member. (~ 30 minutes). Topics:
 - Why is writing in the chosen topic important?
 - How can one write about the chosen topic well?
 - Discuss and supply a rubric for “evaluating” the topic of choice.
3. Review process: (~ 60 minutes)
 - Students should enter the workshop with an example of their work on the topic of choice.
 - Randomized pairs can exchange their individual papers to “neighbouring” pairs, and each pair can discuss amongst themselves about how their peers’ papers can be improved (by using the rubric provided by faculty).
 - Working in pairs encourages discussion, and is hence potentially more beneficial than working as individuals.
 - Each pair would then explain their feedback to their peers, as well as receive an explanation of feedback on their own papers. (Details of the mechanics to be worked out later)
 - The faculty member could potentially be involved (or a second faculty member) by going from pair to pair and giving their input, or just be around to answer questions that the pair may have.
4. Coffee break (15–30 minutes, depending on how long/short the review process is)
5. Post discussion (~ 20 minutes, depending on how chatty the group is)

- Exchanging feedback is sure to generate some disagreement and/or some insight. We'll have a "roundtable discussion" where workshop participants can share their insight, or discuss a controversial decision.
- The faculty member can also be involved with this. Their input would be useful in clarifying any controversies.

4 Potential Issues

There are potential issues with holding a feedback-oriented workshop:

- Students may feel uncomfortable sharing their work.
 - We can't and shouldn't change the sharing feature, but could emphasize the importance of sharing our work.
- We should ensure that the faculty member does not have to take over with the organization of the event (and that it doesn't seem that way).

5 What's Next?

Here is what needs to be done next:

1. (Andy) Send a survey to the graduate students gauging interest on the potential workshop dates, and the potential topics.
 - A small description of the workshop purpose/agenda should also be included.
 - Results should be in by next Friday (January 23rd).
2. (Vincenzo) Call another meeting to discuss implementing the workshop. Some things we need to discuss are:
 - Choosing a faculty member
 - Choosing a date and time for the workshop
 - Possibly supplying the faculty member with an example document to use during their presentation.