

TECHNICAL & PROFESSIONAL WRITING

Writing 3562w
University of Minnesota

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COURSE TOPICS

- The genres of general purpose workplace writing: memos, letters, proposals, instructions, and reports.
- The skills of rhetorical and audience analysis: analyzing contexts, multiple purposes, and potential / multiple audiences.
- The spatial design of visual and verbal information: working with the concepts of text arrangement and document design.
- The features of “readable” written communication: writing that is as grammatically correct and as stylistically appropriate as possible.

WHAT 3562w IS **NOT**

- ❑ Copywriting (advertising): Marketing is a specialized discipline, increasingly based on neuro-psychological research.
- ❑ Science writing (academic or journalistic): Academic writing is not general purpose business writing. Scientific and technical journalism is a specialized field.
- ❑ Grant writing, RFP/RFQ preparation, compliance writing, or any other forms of writing that tend to vary dramatically by field.

The goal of 3562 is to present general purpose business writing to students coming from a variety of disciplines. We explore the specialized forms, but each form would require its own class (or classes).

OUR GOALS

- Produce documents that are stylistically appropriate
- Analyze audience in business settings
- Identify and analyze potential ethical issues
- Write correspondence that conforms to conventions
- Design and test a set of instructions
- Create a proposal and reports that demonstrate an ability to manage a long project
- Use word processing to create usable, attractive documents
- Prepare and deliver an oral presentation using PowerPoint or a similar presentation application.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

- Anderson, Paul V. *Technical Communication: A Reader-Centered Approach*
- Three-ring binder for portfolio, which is collected on last day of class
- Spiral-bound notebook and writing instruments (never forget)
- Index cards, with 4" x 6" suggested for convenience
- A flash drive or jump drive is not required, but will be useful
- You — Attendance is not optional in this course

BUSINESS vs. ACADEMIC

Business writing is not academic. Studies have shown “bookish” writing is considered pretentious or even condescending in the workplace. Learn to write clear and concise prose. Some examples include:

- Shorten or eliminate “bookish” phrases:
 - in order to = “to”; utilize = “use”; in the event that = “if”
- Do not try to impress people with “thesaurus” or “SAT” words.
- Write only what has to be stated or explained — nothing more.
- Remember non-native readers of English and potential translation issues for international audiences.

DESIGN vs. TYPING

*Documents should be designed, not simply typed. I recommend reading *The Mac is Not a Typewriter* by Robin Williams. The academic formatting you have been using is not professional. Some of the differences include:*

- There is one space after any “dot” punctuation mark.*
- Text is italicized instead of underlined for titles and emphasis.*
- Quotes and apostrophes are not primes, ticks, or accent marks: use character maps and insert symbol menus.*
- Typefaces are selected to convey your intentions.*

COLLABORATION

- Every project in this course will involve teams of three or more.
- You will review peers *at least* four times during the semester.
- You will receive anonymous reports on your performance in groups, compiled by the instructor.
- Groups can and likely will change members, except during the instructions unit.
- Your performance affects the group grade... which means other members can affect your grade.

ASSIGNMENT WEIGHTS

PROJECT	POINTS
<i>Résumé and Cover Letter</i>	50
<i>Memos and e-mails</i>	50
<i>Instructions</i>	100
<i>Project Proposal</i>	150
<i>Formal Report / Long Project</i>	200
<i>Binder w/ User Tests and Reports</i>	100
<i>Weekly Responses / Wikibook</i>	150
<i>Participation (includes formal peer reviews)</i>	200
	1000

RÉSUMÉ & COVER LETTER

- Interview two peers from class to help determine personal strengths that should be in career documents.
- Compose a formal introduction and post online before the second class meeting. The intro is a professional document.
- Prepare a professional résumé and a targeted cover letter.
- Review the career documents of two team members using the Word, OpenOffice, Acrobat, or Pages “review” mode.
- Products: Original drafts of both documents, revised documents, and two final documents. Team size: 3-4.

CONTRIBUTING TO WIKIBOOKS

- You will work on a Wiki project and answer weekly questions:
(A) *Contribute to the new Wikibook for 3562w as topics are discussed in class and read about in the text.*
(B) *Compose weekly responses to readings and class discussions based on questions posted online.*
- *Wiki project is important, as it will teach more about technical writing and technology through a collaborative experience.*
- *Both options require 400 to 600 words/wk (roughly one hour each).*
- *Products: Several Wikibook pages and 12 online responses to weekly readings. Team size: Unlimited.*

CREATING INSTRUCTIONS

- Teams propose, develop, and present a concept for a new LEGO® kit.
- Past teams have created exact kits, with boxes and fold-outs. Final reports average 20 pages total, including visual elements.
- Each team will evaluate two other teams' final reports and presentations.
- Each team member will evaluate all other team members once during the project and at the conclusion.
- Products: Initial proposal, memos, draft text-only instructions, draft visuals, final "product pitch" and presentation. Team size: 4-5.

WRITING PROPOSALS

- You will prepare a formal proposal for your final project. Even if working on a collaborative project, such as a Wikibook, your proposal must be independent.
- Proposals must explain the social benefits of the final project.
- You will review two proposals, electronically.
- You will “pitch and defend” your proposal to your group.
- Products: Original draft, reviewed copies, revised documents, and final documents. Team size: 3-4.

FINAL REPORT OR PROJECT

- You will do a final report, involving a non-profit project. This is generally a feasibility study suggesting a solution to a challenge faced by a non-profit organization.
- You should be thinking about this project immediately, since arranging time with a non-profit can be a challenge.
- You may work in pairs on the feasibility study.
- Products: Original drafts, reviewed copies, and final documents.

BINDER & NOTEBOOK

- You should maintain all work in a binder, as “everything” will be assembled into your final portfolio.
- Final portfolio should be professional in appearance.
- Notebooks are not a group assignment — they will contain personal thoughts and observations in many cases.
- Products: Binder will contain most documents, including all drafts. Notebook will contain in-class writings, personal reflections, and other individual assignments.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- You may contact Scott via e-mail or chat at almost any hour: *wyatt050@umn.edu* or *PoetCSW* on Yahoo, AIM, and MSN.
- Scott bowls on most Tuesdays, after class. There is a Facebook group dedicated to bowling at the St. Paul center.
- If you need help with a project, there is absolutely no excuse for not discussing the obstacles you encounter with Scott! He is easy to contact and (generally) quick to respond.