ENG 306, Introduction to Professional Writing

CRN 19578: Beering Hall B280, TR 10:30–11:45 am

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Because of my poor hearing, I don't use voice mail. Please email or text me instead.

I'm @cbdilger on most social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc); friend or follow me if you like.

Introduction

What knowledge, skills, and experience guide the work of professional writers? What good habits help them succeed? How do professional writers make decisions about their writing, their collaborations with others, and the roles writing plays in their organizations? Given that learning isn't confined to school, how do professional writers drive innovation and/ keep up with their fields?

By considering these and other questions, this course will extend the work you began in 203, preparing you for later professional writing courses and projects through an in-depth, hands-on investigation of professional writing. We'll read articles and books written by both scholars and practitioners with a mix of academic and practitioner audiences in mind. We'll consider how research and experience helps build theory, and how theoretical work connects to practice. And we'll create a wide range of documents which help us perform, reflect on, and share what we learn.

Objectives

1. Investigate six concepts central to professional writing: rhetoric, genre, networks, situated learning, ethics, and user-centered design.

2. Connect theoretical concepts in rhetoric and professional writing to practice by considering examples and interviewing a professional in a field of interest to you.

3. Consider best practices for writing, from ideation (invention) to publication, and the role rhetorical theory can play in shaping those practices.

4. Learn to analyze organizations and individuals within them to evaluate, understand, and shape communication practices.

5. Learn best practices for understanding web-based writing, common styles and conventions, and methods for developing, revising, and editing web-based text.

Assignments

This is just an overview. I will provide in-depth assignments throughout the semester.

• **Participation:** Engage actively in our class sessions, discussing the readings, completing brief writing assignments and/or group projects, and generally using our shared time wisely. (Continuous, 10%.)

• **Memoranda:** As we work through the concepts which shape the course, write a series of memoranda which demonstrate your knowledge and explore possibilities for future work. (Weeks 2–7, 25%.)

• **Midterm and final examinations:** Two cumulative examinations using short answer, definitions, and scenarios. (Weeks 8 & EX, 5% & 10% respectively.)

• **Professional writing interview:** Our core project. Interview a working professional and create a web site which describes your methods, what you learned, and its relation to course concepts. Divided into four milestones. (Weeks 9–16, 50%.)

You'll complete smaller assignments in connection with each project. I may or may not respond to these in depth, but I will review all of them.

Readings

Assignments and class activities will lean heavily on readings from our three required texts. Some of the readings can be challenging; I expect you to read them with enough lead time to seek help as needed.

- Ginny Redish, *Letting Go of the Words* (second edition) — while this book targets web-based writing, its lessons apply to numerous writing contexts. Paperback: new $26, used $22; Kindle $20.

- Austin Kleon, *Steal Like an Artist* — one creative person's suggestions we'll use to understand the craft side of rhetoric. Paperback: new $7, used $3; Kindle: not recommended.

- Clay Spinuzzi, *Topsight* — a practitioners' guide to investigating and solving the issues which arise in contemporary knowledge work. We'll use it to deepen our understanding of research methods and our rhetorical core. Paperback: new $18, used $10; Kindle $8.

Plan to keep your books, and use them accordingly. The $20 you'll retrieve from renting or reselling them just isn't worth it.

I will make about 25 articles and other handouts available to you online. Please print them and/or download them onto your devices so they are available to you in classes and conferences, and pay attention to the schedule (below) to ensure you are on time with the reading.

We'll identify more texts to help you understand your interview subject. Some will be available on reserve in the Humanities and Social Sciences Library (HSSE); some you can borrow from me; some you'll need to find on your own.

In our detailed schedule, find useful information about the ways readings will be used in class, so you'll know when you need to carefully read and retain information, or just become familiar with it for later reference.

About me

This is my second year at Purdue. Previously, I was at Western Illinois University, a public university in Macomb, Illinois, about four hours due west of here. I worked at WIU from August 2003 until May 2014, teaching in Macomb and Moline, IL as well. I come to West Lafayette with my bride Erin Easterling and two very busy grrrls, Madelyn (9) and Amelia (6), both born on October 27. I received my PhD in English from the University of Florida in 2003, focusing on the ways writing and networks (both human and technological) are intertwined. When I'm not working, I like to spend time with my family, bike, swim, or run, or work on my house. I'm thrilled to be at Purdue, and I hope you are too.

I want to thank Jenny Bay and Michael Salvo for sharing syllabi with me, talking about our program with me, and allowing me to borrow extensively from their materials.

Guide to success

I think of myself as a reasonable hard-ass: I ask a lot of you and myself too. I'm eager for you to succeed in this class and learn more about the difficult but rewarding craft of writing. Some good ways to do that—in addition to what our course texts say:

1. **Stay in touch.** Use texts, email, phone calls, whatever. I'm happy to talk to you—I'm not giving you my phone number just for show! If you write and don't hear back, try again if it can't wait.

2. **Use the detailed schedule.** My web site will soon include a link to a more detailed schedule with specific prompts about the readings and details about course activities. **Please use it!** It describes the readings you can skim, which you need to really work hard to master, notes when assignments are due, etc. I hope you will use it to make class most effective for you.

3. **Read the texts and take notes.** There's no better way to learn the content of a book than taking notes. I will share my method with you; clone it or adapt your own. Always bring the texts we are reading to class, and your notes too if you can.

4. **Take notes in class.** If you like to use a laptop or tablet to do this, please bring one—but don't get lost in Facebook or texting or whatever. I won't say anything, but I'll surely notice. If this happens more than once, I will suggest you find other ways to take notes, etc.

5. **Participate.** Make comments. Ask questions when you have them. Work steadily and carefully in the computer lab. Share your experiences, good and bad. Doing so helps me help you and everyone else— and part of your grade depends on it. Oversleep? Forget where we are meeting? Come to class anyway; just sneak in as quietly as you can. Better to be late than absent.

6. **Be nice and be honest.** Whether in class, working in small groups, visiting the writing lab, or working in the community, be nice. But be honest too—if you don't understand, or don't like something, say so (nicely). That's the best way we can help each other on the long term.

7. **Start work on the projects immediately.** Writing takes a lot of time, and you can't do it all at once. So please begin work on your projects immediately.

8. **Share your work and show your work.** If you want to come to my office to talk about your editing, bring what you've been working on. Don't throw anything away—seeing your work in progress can help me help you.

9. **Stay on target and be on time.** You can't change plans you outline in project starters or proposals without my approval—inasmuch as I can't change the way I plan to spend grant money I've earned, or radically change the topic I'm writing about for a conference, etc. *You need to ask first.* And as any creative professional will tell you, deadlines are just that—unless you get permission from me, turn your work in early or on time, or expect nothing in return.

10. **Get help with writing if you want it.** My office hours are for you — I'm happy to work with you as often as you like. Purdue's writing lab is one of the best in the country; take advantage!

Policies

1. **Academic honesty is required.** All academic honesty violations will be reported and will result in a failing grade for the assignment and likely the course.

2. **Accommodations for special learning needs are gladly arranged.** Please contact me before September 4 to make an appointment to discuss any accommodations. As per Purdue policy and Federal law, you must initiate contact with me and the Disability Resource Center (http://www.purdue.edu/drc); I cannot do so.

3. **Active participation is required.** Under-prepared students will be asked to drop the class. Reading course texts and participating continually is part of preparation. You must buy the assigned texts, do the readings, and come to class ready to talk about them.

4. **Attendance is expected.** If you miss more than four classes, your final grade will be reduced by one-half letter for every subsequent absence. Absences for bereavement (as per Purdue policy), or for other circumstances which I agree are unavoidable, will not count against this total. However, if you miss more than eight classes, for whatever reason, I will recommend you drop the course.

5. **Class cancellations and emergencies sometimes happen.** Please check your Purdue email before heading to class. If I cancel class, I'll notify you by email in advance if I can. If class has to be cancelled due to weather or another emergency, or if an emergency occurs during classes, we'll follow Purdue's procedures and notifications from Purdue ALERT. We will discuss emergency procedures several times in the first weeks of classes.

6. **Ethical and professional conduct is required.** I expect academic honesty, collegiality in class, and professionalism when working with others—especially in community engagement work . Purdue's non-discrimination policies (http://www.purdue.edu/purdue/ea_eou_statement.html) apply to all classes and course activities. I work hard to ensure my classrooms are spaces where everyone is treated with respect, grace, and common decency, and I welcome your feedback any time.

7. **Feedback about the course is welcome any time.** Just drop me a line. If you want to be anonymous, put a note in my mailbox in Heavilon Hall 324. You can also contact Professional Writing director Michael Salvo if you feel better speaking with someone else about a course-related issue.

8. **Grading uses a power of ten scale.** A=100–90, B=89–80, etc. Keep all graded assignments, and track your own grades. Don't hesitate to contact me if you have a question about a grade I assign. See "Grading" below for more.

9. **Mind all deadlines.** I don't accept late work, unless you have prior permission, or unless extreme circumstances warrant. In-class work cannot be made up; we'll have enough it that occasionally missing it won't hurt your grade. For major assignments, if you need extra time to meet a deadline, please ask. I'm usually happy to give you more time—*if* you ask in advance and explain how extra time will be mutually beneficial.

10. **Purchasing required books and supplies is required.** At the minimum, you must have course texts, computing hardware needed to do coursework, and materials to produce your documents.

11. **Your privacy is important to me.** I don't want to know your PUID or Social Security numbers. Please don't put them on your assignments or in emails. In compliance with relevant privacy laws (FERPA), Purdue requires that I discuss grades with you in confidence, which means I may ask you to move a conversation from email or the hallway to a more private medium.

Selected Purdue policies which apply to this course

Academic Integrity: Purdue offers a detailed "Academic Integrity: A Guide for Students" at
http://www.purdue.edu/odos/osrr/academicintegritybrochure.php

Attendance: The Dean of Students has established a "Class Attendance and Absence Reporting Policy"; find it at http://www.purdue.edu/odos/services/classabsence.php. See also the bereavement policy at http://www.purdue.edu/odos/services/griefabsencepolicyforstudents.php.

Emergencies: As per Purdue policy, "In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances beyond the instructor's control. Relevant changes to this course will be posted onto the course website or can be obtained by contacting the instructors or TAs via email or phone. You are expected to read your @purdue.edu email on a frequent basis. For more information about Emergency Preparedness, see http://www.purdue.edu/ehps/emergency_preparedness/."

Purdue University's Student Conduct Code applies to all work related to our course (in classrooms, completing course work, etc.): http://www.purdue.edu/studentregulations/student_conduct/index.html

Grading

You earn a final grade based on performance, as in any other class.

1. Please track your own grades. If you think I've made a mistake, or evaluated your work unfairly, please let me know. I am happy to re-evaluate your work.

2. You will receive a final grade of F if you do not complete all parts of the major assignments.

3. Academic honesty violations will result in an F grade (1%) for the assignment. Severe violations will result in a final course grade of F as well. All suspected violations are reported.

4. Grades of "Incomplete" are only given in the case of military service, documented medical emergency, or documented death in the family.

5. The table at below left shows the points per assignment. Drop a zero to see the percentage of your final grade each assignment represents (e.g. 100 pts = 10%). This works for milestones, too.

6. The table at below right shows how I figure grades:

   a) I use the "Normal %" to figure the points you earn for an assignment of a given "Letter" grade. For example, a "B+" on a 50 point assignment earns you 44 points (88% of 50).

b) For drafts, I often assign pass-fail grades based on effort and extension of assignments.

c) "Point range" shows how final grades are assigned. I do not assign D+ or D– grades.

Grading point system

Assignment	Points
Memoranda	250
Midterm exam	50
Interview project	500
Final exam	100
Participation	100
Total	**1000**

Letter	Normal %	Point range
A	95	1000–930
A–	91	929–900
B+	88	899–870
B	85	869–830
B–	81	829–800
C+	78	799–770
C	75	769–730
C–	71	729–700
D	65	699–600
F	50	599–0

Weekly schedule

This schedule will change. For a detailed, up to date schedule, please see our course web site at dtext.org.

Wk	Dates	Activities	Readings
1	08/25, 08/27	*Professional writing and rhetoric*	Mattingly & Harkin, "Major in flexibility" Course assignments
2	09/01, 09/03	*Rhetoric* **Memo 1: Defining professional writing**	Redish 1, 2, Int1 (pp. 1–44) Herrick, "Overview of rhetoric" Kleon 1-5 (pp. 1–73)
3	09/08, 09/10	*Genre* **Memo 2: Rhetoric and professional writing**	Bawarshi, "The genre function" Spinuzzi 1, 2 (pp. 1–31) Kleon 6-10 (pp. 74–144)
4	09/15, 09/17	*Networks* **Memo 3: Writing and genre**	Reid, "The write brain" Spinuzzi 19, 20 (pp. 211–238) Spinuzzi, "What is a network?"
5	09/22, 09/24	*Situated learning* **Memo 4: Networks and professional writing**	Anson & Forsberg, "Moving beyond" Artemeva, "Stories of becoming" Beaufort, "Key knowledge domains"
6	09/29, 10/01	*Ethics* **Memo 5: Learning in (networked) contexts**	Haas, "Ethical dilemmas" Spinuzzi 3, 4, 5 (pp. 33–72) Blythe et al, "Action research"
7	10/06, 10/08	*User-centered design* **Memo 6: Ethical writing**	Redish 3, 6, 7, Int2 (pp. 45–72; 101–156) Quesenbery, "Balancing the 5Es"
8	10/15	*Midterm* No class Tue (Fall break) **Midterm examination 10/15**	No assigned readings
9	10/20, 10/22	*Interviewing; Rhetoric & professional writing*	Spinuzzi 6, 7, 8 (pp. 75–113)
10	10/27, 10/29	*Interviewing; Ethics* **Proposal 10/27**	Rude, "Mapping the research questions" Spinuzzi 9, 10, 11 (pp. 115–136)
11	11/03, 11/05	*Planning; Genre* **Progress report 11/05**	Redish 14, Int5, 15 (pp. 289–316) Spinuzzi 12, 13 (pp. 137–151)
12	11/10, 11/12	*Analyzing data; Networks*	Swarts, "Recycled writing" Spinuzzi 14, 15, 16 (pp. 165–194)
13	11/17, 11/19	*Writing; User-centered design* **Draft 11/19**	Redish 8, 9, Int3 (pp. 157–195) Spinuzzi 17, 18, 21 (pp. 195–209; 239–244)
14	11/24	*Writing* No class Thu 11/26 (Thanksgiving)	Spinuzzi 22, 23, 24 (pp. 247–282)
15	12/01, 12/03	*Rhetoric*	Redish 10, 11 (pp. 197–252)
16	12/08, 12/10	*Situated learning* **Final report 12/10**	No assigned readings
EX	12/15	**Final examination** (date, time, method TBD)	