

ENGLISH 317: BUSINESS & TECHNICAL WRITING, FALL 2010

Section: 002	Instructor: Dylan B. Dryer, Ph.D
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Office Hours: Tuesdays 11-12:30; Wednesdays 2:15-4 (or by appointment)	

If you have a disability for which you wish to request an accommodation, please contact Ann Smith, Director of Disabilities Services, 121 East Annex, 581-2319, as early as possible in the term.

PREREQUISITE: Senior or Junior standing as of Fall 2010

REQUIRED MATERIALS FOR EACH CLASS MEETING

- Lannon, John M. (2008). *Technical communication* (11th ed.) New York: Pearson Longman.
- Three-ring binder for all documents. Start with this syllabus and file all correspondence, drafts, handouts, worksheets, and returned work here.
- Legal pad and pen/pencil.
- Hard copy of any assignment due that day; electronic copy uploaded to the “File Storage” folder in your FirstClass account

OUTCOMES FOR ALL SECTIONS OF ENG 317

- Plan, design and create documents that address a variety of audiences and situations and reflect the realities of workplace communication, namely:
 - employ a clear and effective professional writing style
 - summarize complex material
 - design and create effective, appropriate displays of multivariate data
- collaborate in preparing successful documents
- apply accepted standards of ethical practice
- plan, design and execute a formal report that addresses a real or case-based problem for a defined audience; and
- plan, design and deliver effective oral presentations

COURSE DESCRIPTION FOR SECTION 002

Newcomers to business environments face a range of different working conditions and job descriptions, but they are always surprised by the same thing: how much of everyone’s time is spent producing, distributing, reading, revising, and keeping track of texts. Face-to-face interactions, phone calls, and videoconferencing are important parts of what you will encounter in daily life at the office, but most of what you will do is read, create, revise, amend, distribute, correct, interpret, argue about, and otherwise spend the bulk of your business days dealing with physical and electronic texts. You’ll also find that nearly every meeting, videoconference, and phone call has as its primary subject matter some text that needs clarifying, revising, re-interpreting, reassigning, or generating.

Finally, you’ll find that the circulation of documents within and among business organizations is as much about building and maintaining *social relations* as it is about any particular individual business transaction. This section of ENG 317 will therefore emphasize the importance of

context, audience, and purpose for workplace writing tasks. Through discovering the effective use of tone, content, and organization, you will develop your understanding not only of how to respond to the needs of your business, but also to use writing to solve problems, clarify misunderstandings, resolve issues, and maintain and mend relationships, both with your immediate superiors and subordinates and with business partners outside your firm.

APPROACH TO TEACHING & LEARNING

You may find that the course differs from what you have experienced in other academic programs. As the professor, I will not be doing as much formal lecturing as you might be accustomed to; instead, the course is project-driven and the instruction is hands-on, with my role being similar to that of a middle-manager. That is, I am the one who directly evaluates the quality of your work, but I'm also the mentor or coach who works closely with you and wants to help you perform well. You will be working on a number of writing tasks, some individual but mostly collaborative. Together with the course text, I'll provide you with the concepts and strategies you'll need to accomplish the task and then give you feedback on the texts you produce.

The context for each of the 5 case-studies in the schedule of classes below is that we will take on the role of "317, Ltd." a developer, manufacturer, and distributor of ambient lighting installations and arrays for convention halls, laboratories, studios, and shopping malls. We're the largest such company in New England, but the 4th nationwide. The number one and number three companies are both in California—Los Angeles and Oakland, respectively, and the number two company is in Chicago. We're having difficulty reaching customers in the Midwest and west coast, and the Chicago company is also cutting into our abilities to reach new customers in the south, where a significant percentage of new development is happening. Given our large investment in production facilities before the current recession hit, we're going to have to increase revenues and cut costs—or downsize.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance. The front-office employees of 317 Ltd. have three business meetings a week for 50 minutes, and your attendance is expected. Sometimes things happen, so over the course of the term, it may be necessary for you to miss the occasional meeting. You may miss up to six of our meetings, if you must, but no more. There is no need to tell me about the reason for any absence. If you need to miss a meeting, miss it; however, I recommend that you save your absences for **unexpected** and **unavoidable** emergencies. There are no excused or unexcused absences; you're either in-meeting or you're not. Being present means being there the entire time. On your 7th missed meeting, you'll have to be let go with a grade of F.

Project Ownership and Professionalism. Your co-workers and I will value your ability to "own" projects. A worker who owns projects takes care to plan properly. There is almost no problem that arises in the workplace that is not in some way related to poor planning—most often an underestimation of the time needed to complete a project or an oversight in building in a buffer for contingencies. Therefore, complications that arise during your attempt to complete an assignment become part of the assignment. If your printer runs out of ink, for example, it becomes part of the assignment to find another place to print your work. In the boardroom, you'll be expected to arrive on time and prepared, to stay focused, to contribute meaningfully to our discussions, to ask pertinent questions, to help your colleagues develop their ideas, to help solve problems, and to diplomatically give and graciously accept—and

act on—constructive criticism. You’ll be expected to contribute fully to collaborative writing projects and meet deadlines you set in your workgroup.

Grading. I’ll be monitoring both your project ownership and your professionalism over the course of the term. It will constitute a quarter of your final grade. I’ll calculate the other three-quarters this way: while businesses sometimes have internal metrics to assess employee performance (sales figures, percentage of deals closed, client surveys, and so on), they don’t tend to provide immediate quantitative feedback on everyday communications, transactions, and projects. Instead, retention and promotion decisions (or “performance reviews”) are long-term, usually cumulative impressions built up over time and subject to revision and shared perception. For this reason, I do not assign numerical evaluations to your assignments. Because this is a university setting, I’ll aggregate a series of letter grades, which will be converted to a 4-point scale and weighted to arrive at your final course grade. We’ll discuss your progress at our 5th, 10th, and 15th week performance reviews.

But don’t get too distracted by the grades themselves; what’s more important is what they stand for—in this case, how they would roughly translate into a manager’s write-up of your performance review for upper-level management and Human Resources.

Letter Grade	Bottom-line of an equivalent performance review; pluses and minuses may be used to indicate relevant position between categories
A	Impressive. You’ll be remembered when the company is in an expansion phase and looking to move employees into management positions, or when high-stakes opportunities arise that need a trustworthy worker with solid project ownership.
B	Satisfactory. Your work is solid, if not especially memorable. You’re dependable and productive, and while you’re not fast-tracked for promotion, your position is reasonably secure. Gradual increases in responsibility and merit pay should come your way.
C	Inconsistent. Your work is not likely to be released to a client or another department without extra oversight. You may not be entrusted with certain assignments and you’re likely to be passed over for promotion until your work and/or project ownership improves. While you’re not in immediate jeopardy, you’re not necessarily considered an asset to the company, either, and you may be vulnerable if the company has to downsize.
D	Troubling. Your work is regarded as consistently poor in quality, and while the company may not be actively pursuing your termination, any sort of economic downturn or managerial reorganization will not go well for you. If an exceptional applicant for your position should apply, you may be let go.
F	Unacceptable. The company is actively seeking your replacement.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

<i>Week</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Homework for Today's Class:</i>	<i>Agenda for Today's Class:</i>
1	8/30	---	Introductions to the course and to each other
	9/1	Review syllabus, prepare questions for next class meeting	Finalize discussion of course policies and procedures; distribution of survey
	9/3	Email answers to survey by 6:00 pm 9/2	Establish workgroups, develop internal and external letterhead templates
2	9/6	Labor Day – No Class	
	9/8	Read 26-45	Assessing audience; retrofitting texts to meet the needs of different readers
	9/10	Do Exercise 4, page 46	Review anticipated and unanticipated difficulties in reading comprehension – considering the user/text interface and differing awareness of “technicality”
3	9/13	Read 326-353 Do exercise 8, pg 355-6; Cluster categories and provide a paragraph of rationale for each category	Topic: Internal correspondence – the email and its predecessor, the memo Consensus on exercise 8? Discussion, Case Study I
	9/15	Draft memo for Case Study I; Read 96-107	Generate collaborative revision of Case Study I memo; due via email by end of class
	9/17	---	Discussion, Case study II
4	9/20	Case Study II memo, with attachments, due at the beginning of class	Discussion, research on proofing and editing Consider alternative revisions to instructions;
	9/22	Read 490-517 Do exercise 1, page 518	Topic – Instructions and Procedures discussion, Case Study III
	9/24	Draft of Case Study III (version A and B)	Discussion: anticipating audience, using feedback
5	9/27	Final draft of Case Study III due via email, 2:00 pm, 9/26 Read 360-385; do Exercise 6 on page 386 before class	Topic: External correspondence – letters and letterhead; Letters of inquiry, transmittal, and acknowledgement
	9/29	Do exercise a, b, c, or d, but twice: first grant, then refuse the request. Both letters due via email, 6:00 pm, 9/28	Complaint, refusal, and agreement letters Discussion of sample letters; discussion of Case Study IV
	10/1	Draft response to Case-Study IV due in class	Workshop responses
6	10/4-6	Week 5 Performance Reviews 15% of Final Course Grade	
	10/8	Final response to Case-Study Scenario IV due in class	Discussion – road ahead for the final project: Research, Proposal, and Report; Case Study V
7	10/11	Fall Break – No Class	
	10/13	Read 113-146; develop four questions from Case Study Profile	Revise questions, rank and assign priorities

7	10/15	Commit to question with rationale and action plan for analytical research report, due via email 6:00 pm 10/14	Discussion: uses and limitations of primary and secondary sources
8	10/18	Read 149-170; Choose 5 of the bullets from Exercise 1, page 171 and describe an example from each.	Discussion: distortions of findings and their effect on recommendations; research resource for analytical report
	10/20	Sources for analytical research report due in class	Discuss uses and limitations of sources
	10/22	Using Fig. 24.4 (pgs 585-592) as a model, prepare outline for analytical research report with draft recommendation	Workshop outlines and test recommendations
9	10/25	Read 174-188; Draft research report due in class with draft recommendation(s)	Discuss problem-solving techniques for tone and wording in recommendations; the importance of conditional language and causal reasoning
	10/27	Analytical Research Report due in class with final recommendations and rationale for additional study	Workgroups strategize ways to turn reports to proposals
	10/29	Read 522-555; Draft transmittal memo with executive summary and proposal for future research to appropriate members of C-Suite due in class	Workshop drafts
10	11/1	Complete analytical report package due in class	Discussion: Progress reports – solicited and unsolicited
	11/3-5	Week 10 Performance Reviews: 25% of Final Course Grade	
11	11/8	Class cancelled	
	11/10	Solicited progress report due 5:00 pm 11/9	Workshop with questionnaire
	11/12	Final solicited progress report due in class	Discussion – Maps, charts, and visual displays of quantitative information
12	11/15	Read 252-290; Do Exercise 1, page 294, email displays by 6:00 pm, 11/14	Discussion, sample displays; discussion, exercise 7, workgroups assigned to take on specific challenges
	11/17	Workgroups to prepare assigned visuals	Discussion, comparative visuals, esp. in light of potential distortion of information
	11/19	Bring a draft visual display for own research finding	Workshop visuals
13	11/22	Read 597 - 606	Q&A, formal documentation, presentation, and other workplace conventions; “job ad” released
	11/24-6	Thanksgiving Break – No Class	
14	11/29 – 12/3	Read 608-629	Oral Presentations
15	12/6	Read 388-422	Oral Presentations
	12/8	Proofreading Collaborative	
	12/10	Portfolio Due: includes cover letter, resume, and Final Analytical Report as an example of work-product in response to job ad released 11/22 Week 15 Performance Reviews: 35% of Final Course Grade	