
English 420: Business Writing

1:30-2:45pm | WTH 212

Instructor: Fernando Sánchez
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Overview

English 420 teaches students the rhetorical principles and writing practices necessary for producing effective business letters, memos, reports, and collaborative projects in professional contexts. The curriculum is informed by current research in rhetoric and professional writing and is guided by the needs and practices of business, industry, and society at large, as well as by the expectations of Purdue students and programs. All sections of English 420 are offered in networked computer classrooms or exclusively online to ensure that students taking the course are prepared for the writing environment of the 21st-century workplace. The course teaches the rhetorical principles that help students shape their business writing ethically, for multiple audiences, in a variety of professional situations.

Required Materials

Professional Writing Online by Patricia Sullivan and James Porter. (www.pearsonhighered.com/pwo)
A Packet of Markers (Crayola or other Permanent types work well).

Course Goals

Writing in Context

Analyze professional cultures, social contexts, and audiences to determine how they shape the various purposes and forms of workplace writing, such as persuasion, organizational communication, and public discourse, with an emphasis on

- writing for a range of defined audiences and stakeholders
- negotiating the ethical dimensions of workplace communication

Project Management

Understand, develop and deploy various strategies for planning, researching, drafting, revising, and editing documents both individually and collaboratively.

- Select and use appropriate technologies that effectively and ethically address professional situations and audiences.
- Build professional ethos through documentation and accountability.

Document Design

Make rhetorical design decisions about workplace documents, including

- Understanding and adapting to genre conventions and audience expectations
- Understanding and implementing design principles of format and layout
- Interpreting and arguing with design
- Drafting, researching, testing, and revising visual designs and information architecture

Teamwork

Learn and apply strategies for successful teamwork and collaboration, such as

- Working online with colleagues

- Determining roles and responsibilities
- Managing team conflicts constructively
- Responding constructively to peers' work
- Soliciting and using peer feedback effectively
- Achieving team goals

Research

Understand and use various research methods to produce professional documents, including

- analyzing professional contexts
- locating, evaluating, and using print and online information selectively for particular audiences and purposes
- triangulating sources of evidence
- selecting appropriate primary research methods, such as interviews, observations, focus groups, and surveys to collect data
- working ethically with research participants

Technology

Use and evaluate the writing technologies frequently used in the workplace, such as emailing, instant messaging, image editing, video editing, presentation design and delivery, HTML editing, Web browsing, content management, and desktop publishing technologies.

Course Projects and Activities

Unit 1: The Backgrounder (White Paper)

The focus of Unit 1 is the backgrounder, a common report genre in the professional world.

Backgrounders are used in business, industrial, and governmental contexts to sum up the gist of what's known about a subject and, often, to market a product. During this project you will learn about

- new writing and communication technologies that support business writing in college and the workplace, with attention to open source and other freely available software or writing spaces (online networks, blogging, etc.)
- collaboration, project management, and strategies for writing and revising.

Unit 2: Group Project

For Unit 2, you will work collaboratively in project teams on a client-based service-learning project that teaches you to manage complex writing challenges in real contexts that matter. You will learn principles of project management, collaboration, document cycling, oral presentation, and client-based research.

Because you will work with real clients—either in the community or online, you will also learn important principles of professional and ethical communication.

Unit 3: Employment Project

You will be asked to locate a job for which you are qualified and apply for it. Step 1 of the project asks you to learn about and use various web-based resources for job seekers and ultimately to select one job or internship to pursue. Steps 2 and 3 ask you to prepare the all-important "Job Application Letter" and a resume specifically designed for the job or internship you've selected in Step 1. In Step 4, you will assess your experience in a "Project Assessment Document." In the process of completing each step, you will work closely with your peers and your instructor to shape your writing so that it represents you and your experience fully and effectively, given the rhetorical circumstances. You will also study and respond to examples from the textbook.

Reading Responses

We will have many readings each week, and you are responsible for writing regular reading responses.

The reading responses will synthesize the readings and your reactions to them, much like class discussion.

Comments and Replies (When necessary)

All comments and replies to another's blog post should follow effective rhetorical strategies for networking with others on the Web. (Readings from the course text provide guidelines to follow.)

- Keep threads alive and relevant.
- Follow-up comments with further discussion.
- Think of your comments and replies as part of a lively class discussion in which everyone participates.

Grading

Backgrounder Project (Individual) 25%
 Group Project (Group) 25%
 Employment Project (individual) 25%
 Ethos (Individual) 25%

The three major projects in the course will be comprised of several components, each of which will be worth a percentage of your final grade.

All major assignments will be graded on the standard plus-minus letter-grade scale: A=100-94, A-=93-90, B+=89-87, B=86-84, B-=83-80, C+=79-77, C=76-74, C-=73-70, D+=69-67, D=66-64, D-=63-60, F=59 or below.

Students must participate in all of the three major projects and complete a majority of the required weblog posting assignments in order to pass this class. Students with questions about final grades should review university policies regarding grade appeals, which are outlined by the Dean of Students here: <http://www.purdue.edu/odos/osrr/gradeappeal.pdf>. The University regulations are here: http://www.purdue.edu/univregs/pages/stu_conduct/stu_regulations.html.

Ethos (See handout on Ethos for more detailed information)

This portion of your grade will be based on

- How well you implement the guidelines and best practices for posting comments and creating reading responses, as presented on our course site and discussed in the textbook.
- The degree to which your peer reviews and responses offer insightful feedback and suggestions on your classmates' drafts.
- The degree to which your reading responses and comment posts demonstrate learning of the course content.
- The degree to which your reading responses and comment posts engage with and contribute to the learning of others in the course.
- Your overall professionalism

Late Work

The majority of missed class assignments cannot be made up. If a serious and unavoidable problem arises, however, you should contact me in writing prior to the deadline to determine whether or not an extension for the work will or will not be granted.

Technology Requirements

In order to participate fully in the course, you should already be able to use the technology platform and applications listed below.

- Mac OS X or Windows XP, Vista, Windows 7
- Microsoft Office for the PC or Mac (Word, PowerPoint, Excel) or Apple counterparts (Pages, Keynote, Numbers)
- Web Browser (e.g., Firefox, Safari, or Internet Explorer 8)
- Email Program (e.g., Purdue Webmail, Thunderbird, Gmail, etc.)
- Adobe Acrobat and Reader (for PDF documents, collaborative review)

Technology Responsibilities

Familiarity with certain technologies is crucial for participation and success in the course. If you need any assistance now or at any point during the semester, please do not hesitate to ask.

During the semester, you'll need regular access to the Internet and email. Because the course home page is the main locus of the class community, you are responsible for reading and keeping current with all content posted there, including what has been submitted by both the instructor and your fellow students. You'll be responsible for configuring your system to access course materials, to read course email and participate in online discussions, and to submit your work. Very early in the semester, you will be asked to demonstrate that you can meet these responsibilities:

- Post a message about yourself and your interests
- Read the course description and calendar, then ask questions when you are uncertain about requirements or activities.
- Set up your @purdue.edu email or an alternative that you can access regularly and reliably
- Become proficient sending and receiving email attachments, resolving file compatibility issues, and following email decorum.
- Check the course calendar before each class meeting.
- Become proficient participating in the class online space.
- Become more proficient with unfamiliar computer technologies and applications, including
- Web editing software, document cycling systems, desktop publishing applications, and graphics programs.
- Maintain back-up copies of all assignments via your home directory, disks, USB drives, or CDs.

If at any time you have problems accessing the Internet from home, you'll need to find a public lab or connection point. Problems with computers will not be an excuse for falling behind or failing to complete required assignments. If your Internet service goes down, find another connection point. If your computer breaks, use another one. In other words, find a way to complete the assignments on time. Because computer problems are a fact of life, always work to complete your assignments early and make frequent backups to multiple media.

Collaborative Work

Teamwork is a required component of the course. You and your project team members are responsible for updating one another and me about assignment development and progress. In addition, you also are responsible for negotiating together all aspects of your work, including planning, drafting, revising, file managing, and scheduling of assignments. When a collaborative project is assigned, you will receive explicit guidelines for successful collaboration.

Attendance

Attendance is required at all scheduled electronic and face-to-face (F2F) meetings. Since you will be working in project teams much of the semester, you also will be required to attend any scheduled out-of-class meetings with your team to complete course assignments. Three absences may result in your

final grade being lowered by as much as a letter grade. More than three absences can result in a failing grade for the course. Excused absences may be granted for religious holidays or university-sponsored events, provided you make a written request to me no less than two weeks in advance and that you complete any required work before the due date. Being excessively or regularly late for class or team meetings, both electronic and F2F, can also be counted as an absence.

Academic Integrity

Purdue students and their instructors are expected to adhere to guidelines set forth by the Dean of Students in "Academic Integrity: A Guide for Students," which students are encouraged to read here: <http://www.purdue.edu/odos/osrr/academicintegritybrochure.php>

The preamble of this guide states the following: *"Purdue University values intellectual integrity and the highest standards of academic conduct. To be prepared to meet societal needs as leaders and role models, students must be educated in an ethical learning environment that promotes a high standard of honor in scholastic work. Academic dishonesty undermines institutional integrity and threatens the academic fabric of Purdue University. Dishonesty is not an acceptable avenue to success. It diminishes the quality of a Purdue education, which is valued because of Purdue's high academic standards."*

Academic dishonesty is defined as follows: "Purdue prohibits "dishonesty in connection with any University activity. Cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information to the University are examples of dishonesty." [University Regulations, Part V, Section III, B, 2, a] Furthermore, the University Senate has stipulated that "the commitment of acts of cheating, lying, and deceit in any of their diverse forms (such as the use of substitutes for taking examinations, the use of illegal cribs, plagiarism, and copying during examinations) is dishonest and must not be tolerated. Moreover, knowingly to aid and abet, directly or indirectly, other parties in committing dishonest acts is in itself dishonest." [University Senate Document 72-18, December 15, 1972]"

If you have any questions about this policy, please ask.

In Case of a Campus Emergency

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. You can acquire updated information from the course website, by emailing me, or by contacting me through the English Department at 765-494-3740.

Classroom Civility Statement

Purdue University is committed to fostering diversity and inclusion and welcomes individuals of all ages, religions, sex, sexual orientations, races, nationalities, languages, military experience, disabilities, family statuses, gender identities and expressions, political views, and socioeconomic statuses. Please respect the different experiences, beliefs and values expressed by everyone in this course. Behaviors that threaten, harass, discriminate or that are disrespectful of others will not be tolerated. Inappropriate behaviors will be addressed with disciplinary action, which may include being referred to the Office of the Dean of Students.