Syllabus, Spring 2015
EN.661.110: Professional Communications for Science, Business and Industry
Johns Hopkins University, Center for Leadership Education

*Note: Extra Credit Opportunity: I added three typos to this syllabus. If, during the first three weeks of the semester, you show me all three typos during office hours or at some other time outside of class, I will add 1% to your final grade for the course, the maximum possible semester grade being 100%.

Class meetings: TTh 9:00 - 10:15 AM (sect. 1), 10:30 - 11:45 AM (sect. 2)
Hodson 301 (sect. 1), Hodson 203 (sect. 2)
Instructor: Jay R. Thompson
jayrthompson1727@gmail.com

Office Hours:
Thursdays, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. (and by appointment), Maryland Hall, basement, Suite 16

REQUIRED TEXTS:

*Presentation Zen*
Garr Reynolds

*Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace*
Williams and Colomb
ISBN: 978-0321953308

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course teaches students to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences. Course content emphasizes writing clearly and persuasively, creating appropriate visuals, developing oral presentation skills, working in collaborative groups, giving and receiving feedback, and simulating the real-world working environment in which most communication occurs. Readings will be in textbooks, handouts, or on the internet, and will be discussed in class, time permitting. Some lectures will focus on the current or upcoming assignment while other lectures will focus more generally on writing, speaking, or communicating regardless of medium.

IMPORTANT NOTE:
Whether on a first draft or final draft, I can not mark everything that needs attention in your writing. I am not an editing service. I only have time to mark up the most distracting or prominent errors in your writing, and to provide a brief summary of my criticisms at the end of your draft. It is your responsibility to apply the lessons from lectures, textbooks, and handouts to your writing. If you merely go through the motions, if you treat this class as an obstacle rather than an opportunity, if do not pay attention in class, if you fail to take notes, or if you do not carefully read the textbooks, you will do poorly in this course. Likewise, if you fail to apply my marks and comments from one assignment to the next assignment, you will do poorly in this course. That’s a promise.

CORE PRINCIPLES:
1. You impress a reader not by using dense academic language, but by communicating clearly and to the point, and by making the audience’s job easy. With that in mind, be precise, direct, clear, concise, and convincing; use active voice rather than passive voice; keep in mind the purpose or goal of your text or speech; eliminate nominalizations and jargon; be original — avoid staple phrases and clichés; and remove all obstacles and speed-bumps for the reader.

2. Effective communication, and writing in particular, is a means to inform or persuade, to secure research grants, or a job, a raise, an internship, or a fellowship. Writing is unlike mathematics, history, engineering, the sciences, and many other fields because it is not something to be memorized or that you can cram the night before a test. Writing is a craft, a skill that must be practiced and honed. Effective writers are not those who compose a flawless first draft, but those who know to first get their ideas on paper, and then rewrite, edit, edit, edit, and proofread.

GRADING
Your assignments will be graded primarily on how well you do two things:
1. Apply the writing and presentation techniques from the textbooks, from lectures, and from handouts (Examples: clarity, concision, active voice, direct language, smooth and coherent sentences and paragraphs, clear and specific examples and illustrations, etc.).
2. Avoid the bad habits from the same resources as above (Examples: inclusion of jargon, vague and abstract terms, unnecessary words and phrases, passive sentences, staple phrases, cliches, generalities, complex and academic language for no good reason, dense and unreadable presentation slides, etc.). In short, your goal is to eliminate (and avoid creating) distractions and obstacles between your message and your audience.

Semester grade breakdown:
Job Application Materials 15%
Feature Article 25%
Revision Exercise 10%
Final project 40%
  • Proposal Memo (No Grade)
  • “White Paper” Report 15%
  • Group Presentation 15%
  • Project Eval. Memo 10%
Participation 10% *

*You are expected to participate frequently. You may be asked to read aloud or think aloud, or do spontaneous writing exercises. Your participation grade is also based on your punctuality, attitude toward the course, ability to stay focused during class, participation in discussions, coming prepared for class, and so on. Each absence after #3 will result in a 2% deduction from your semester grade.

HOW ASSIGNMENTS WORK
1. Format

Unless I say otherwise, your work must be double-spaced, in 12 pt font with standard margins. If you do not staple your assignment, I will deduct 5% from your assignment grade. You must also number your pages and include first and last name, the date, and the title of the assignment somewhere at or near the top of your paper.

2. The process

Submit homework to instructor at beginning of class on the day it’s due. Must be a hard copy — printed and handed to me — not via email. I then mark up your work and return it to you. If the assignment has both a first and second draft, you not only consider my comments and feedback, but also make other improvements. Due to time constraints, I am unable to comment on or mark up every aspect of your writing that needs attention. So you must go beyond my comments and apply course content to truly improve your assignments, not only to do well in this course, but also to develop a lasting comprehension the concepts of the course.

3. If circumstances necessitate that your assignment be emailed to me...

Assignments with multiple pages or multiple components must be combined into a single .doc or .pages file before they’re sent to me, and the filename should be as follows:

LastnameFirstInitial_AbbreviatedAssignmentDescription_DraftNumber

Examples:

ThompsonJ_JobAppMatls_1
HongH_RevEx_2

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Job Application Package
The purpose of this assignment is to create resumes and cover letters to use for internships, scholarships, or future employment. You will turn in a sort of curriculum vitae (no grade for CV) as well as two cover letters (one page each, single-spaced) and one resume. One cover letter will be tailored to a position of your choosing — a job, internship or the like — that you found on the internet or elsewhere (not from craigslist). The other cover letter will be tailored to one of three job ads I provide.

Feature Article
You’ll write a feature article in the style and tone of a mainstream, non-specialty magazine, seven to nine pages, on the topic of your choice. You can profile a professor, write about a campus-related topic, or something else. You are not permitted to turn in an introduction to or history of a subject. You must have a theme, also known as a thesis, or argument, or point.

Revision Exercise
I will provide you with a document (or a few documents to choose from), and you will rewrite it, applying concepts from the textbook and from lectures, making the document readable, smooth and engaging. Two to three pages.

White Paper Proposal Memo (No Grade)
For this assignment and the next two assignments, you will work as a member of a collaborative team that learns deeply about a current “social problem” and proposes a solution to that problem. For this part of the project, your team will write a memo specifying the social problem (such as homelessness, hunger, poverty, disease, income inequality) that you would like to
solve, as well as a proposed tentative action(s) you think might help to solve it. One page, single-spaced.

“White Paper” report
NO EXTENSIONS, and NO TKs or CKs. Your team will research your chosen social problem and write a “white paper” — 15 or more pages in length, double-spaced — that documents the problem, outlines your solution, anticipates and addresses criticisms, and makes a captivating and engaging argument. Footnotes required.

Pitch in front of class (along with handout & slides)
Your team will deliver a presentation that details the social problem your “White Paper” addressed and persuades the audience to accept your initiative as the right solution to the problem. You must include compelling slides, illustrations, graphs, sources and information to back up your claims, etc. At the time of presentation, you must also distribute a one-page handout that dynamically and interestingly summarizes the main “take-aways” from your presentation. Your presentation must be persuasive, as if your audience were people with deep pockets looking to fund a good solution. In the presentation, do not attempt to include all the information you included in your White Paper report. Different mediums usually require different content and style.

Project Evaluation Memo
You will write a one-page, single-spaced memo, evaluating the effectiveness of your group’s white paper and presentation. You will also concisely evaluate how much effort each of your group members put into the entire project. This is NOT a group assignment. Each student writes a separate memo, and only the instructor reads it. You must email memo to instructor within 48 hours following your presentation, so do not wait until the day of your presentation to start composing your memo.

Final Exam
No final exam for this course. Sorry.

COURSE POLICIES

Communication is the name of the game
This course is intended to cultivate and refine your effectiveness at not only writing and presenting, but at communication in general, as one does in a real-world professional setting. If you do not reply clearly, concisely, and in a timely fashion to emails from your fellow group members, your grade will likely suffer. If you are unable to compromise, or if you fail to troubleshoot communication challenges with your fellow group members, your grade will likely suffer. If you don’t understand something that I or a group member says, then ask for clarification. If you disagree with group-mates, but be respectful and reasonable. If you send me a lengthy email or an email requiring a lengthy or complex answer on the day before an assignment is due, your grade will suffer. Do NOT ask me questions via email solely because you’re too shy, embarrassed, or lazy to ask in class. When a student asks a question via email, other students nearly always email me the same question, and replying to all of them consumes time that I could be spending improving classroom activities, giving effective feedback on papers, and other valuable tasks. We nearly always benefit as a group if you simply interrupt class and ask the question.

Attend Class
Each absence after #3 will result in a 2% deduction from your final grade. The best possible final grade is 100%. So if your coursework were perfect but you missed five classes, your final grade would be 96%. If you know in advance that you will miss a class, you must tell me in advance so that you’ll be sure to stay caught up.

Be on time
Classes are short and I often talk fast, so if you’re even a little late, you’ll miss things. Plus, I don’t like being interrupted, and punctuality is part of your participation grade. Don’t be late. Speaking of not being interrupted...

Cell phones
I shouldn’t really have to say this, but cell phones must be turned off before class begins. If an immediate family member’s life is in danger or a you have some other unusual and serious situation, simply let me know beforehand and I’ll make an exception. Otherwise, phones are off and put away.

Extensions
I will grant extensions only if you come and speak with me about obtaining an extension at least one week before the assignment is due. If you do not make such arrangements and you miss the due date, I will not accept your work. You will NOT receive an automatic extension if you miss a class during which an assignment is due. If you’re going to miss class and you want full credit for the due assignment, you must turn in the assignment to me before the beginning of that class. For every day late an assignment is turned in, I will deduct 5% from that assignment’s grade (this includes both first and second drafts). If, for example, you turn in an assignment three days late and it’s flawless, you would be awarded only 85% instead of 100% (Note: Your assignment is unlikely to be flawless).

Email
Email is a great way to contact me, and I am happy to answer any course-related questions you might have. I usually respond within a few hours, but I’m not always staring at my email inbox, so it might take as long as 24-48 hours for me to respond. If you are absent, please do not email me and ask me for notes from the class, or to summarize the lesson for you, or to send you the Powerpoint. Instead, contact a fellow student for any notes. Today would be a good time to make a friend.

Revision and Grading
Revision is an integral part of the writing process, and some of your assignments will require you to turn in more than one draft. When I comment on your work, I will usually make general comments about the quality, writing style, and overall success of your document, along with particular line edits that I simply can’t ignore. However, I do not mark everything that is “wrong” in the document or serve as an editing service. If you turn in a final draft having only improved the spots I flagged, your grade will suffer. You may need to re-think, re-shape, and re-conceptualize the document as a whole in order to make it succeed.

Workshops
We critique the writing, not the person who wrote it. If something feels wrong about a word, sentence, paragraph or structure, try to articulate what that thing is, and suggest solutions to the problem. You are not expected to correct every detail of a classmate’s writing. You are required to be thorough. Comments on classmates’ work should include include line-edits, as well as a paragraph summarizing the piece’s overall strengths and weaknesses. You may use your
computer’s “track changes” feature to mark classmates’ writing. **Don’t forget to exchange email addresses with your group members.**

**Class Discussions**
Please don’t hold back because you feel your idea may be incorrect or unpopular. One of the best ways to test and improve our ideas is to offer them up for criticism. Likewise, when someone is talking, don’t interrupt, especially if the subject is sensitive. Some of us don’t even realize we interrupt frequently, so let’s wrk together to try to remember. Writing can be a subjective thing at times. We will benefit most from this course if we respect the diversity of opinions. This is a communications course, so yelling won’t be tolerated.

**Help for Non-Native Speakers**
The CLE offers free ESOL tutoring services to foreign students who need extra help with grammar/mechanics issues in their papers. Denise Link-Farajali and Laura Davis hold regular office hours during the week. You can schedule an appointment with either of them through the CLE’s website. [http://eng.jhu.edu/wse/cle/page/esl](http://eng.jhu.edu/wse/cle/page/esl)

**Ethics**
The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition.

In addition, the specific ethics guidelines for this course are:

1. In this course, some of your assignments will include information for which you are NOT the original source. Whether in a journalistic feature article or an oral presentation, you must make clear for the audience that certain facts, phrases, and sentences are not yours but from another source. You must also make clear for the reader the publication name, the author’s name, and the publication date.

2. You may collaborate with other students in this course, but only under these conditions: In the final project, which includes the memo, the “white paper” and the oral presentation, you will work with classmates in a balanced and fair distribution of tasks and time spent. In any assignment that includes a rough draft and a workshop, you should provide feedback to, and receive feedback from, your group members, but you are not to write anything for them, nor accept segments of writing from them to be placed in your own assignment. If you have questions about this policy, please ask the instructor.

Report any violations you witness to the instructor.

You can find more information about university misconduct policies on the web at these sites:
- For undergraduates: [http://e-catalog.jhu.edu/undergrad-students/student-life-policies/](http://e-catalog.jhu.edu/undergrad-students/student-life-policies/)
- For graduate students: [http://e-catalog.jhu.edu/grad-students/graduate-specific-policies/](http://e-catalog.jhu.edu/grad-students/graduate-specific-policies/)

If you do not adhere to the above-mentioned policies, I reserve the right to kick you out of class for the day. We will discuss any impact this may have on your grade after the fact.
ABET Outcomes

- Ability to function on multidisciplinary teams (d).
- Understanding of professional and ethical responsibility (f).
- Ability to communicate effectively (g).
- The broad education necessary to understand the impact of engineering solutions in a global and societal context (h).
- Recognition of the need for and an ability to engage in life-long learning (i).
- Knowledge of contemporary issues (j)
ROUGH COURSE SCHEDULE

Jan. 27: Course overview, Syllabus, etc.  
FOR NEXT WEEK: Read Style Lessons 1 & 2

Jan. 29: LECTURE: Resumes and Cover Letters, and more tips about the course  
ASSIGN: Job Application Package

Feb. 3: LECTURE/DISCUSSION: Style Lessons 1 & 2  
ACTIVITY POSSIBLE

Feb. 5: LECTURE / DISCUSSION: Finish Style 1 & 2, and more on first assignment  
ASSIGN: Feature Article (Get crackin!)  
FOR NEXT WEEK: Read Style Lessons 3 & 4  
[Note: Friday, Feb. 6, is the last day you can add courses]

Feb. 10: LECTURE/DISCUSSION: Style Lesson 3, more about feature articles  
ACTIVITY POSSIBLE

Feb. 12: DUE: First draft of Job Application Package  
LECTURE: Style Lesson 4, Feature Articles, importance of theme  
ACTIVITY: Form feature groups, exchange emails, help each other develop topics.  
FOR NEXT WEEK: Read Style Lessons 5 & 6, decide on feature topic.

Feb. 17: LECTURE/DISCUSSION: More about Feature Article/Style Lessons 5  
ACTIVITY: Class helps individuals come up with feature topics, instructor approves.

Feb. 19: LECTURE/DISCUSSION: More about Style Lesson 6  
ACTIVITY: Class helps individuals come up with feature topics, instructor approves.  
FOR NEXT WEEK: Read Style Lessons 7 & 8

Feb. 24: LECTURE/DISCUSSION: Style Lessons 7  
ASSIGN: Revision Exercise

Feb. 26: LECTURE/DISCUSSION: Style Lessons 8  
ACTIVITY POSSIBLE  
FOR NEXT WEEK: Read Style Lessons 9 & 10

March 3: LECTURE/DISCUSSION: Style Lessons 9 & 10  
LECTURE: Final project, approaches for developing paper and presentation  
ACTIVITY: Form new groups for “The Project,” brainstorm topics/solutions

March 5: DUE: Final draft of application materials  
LECTURE/DISCUSSION: Tuesday topics cont’d, and Q&A on feature problems.  
FOR NEXT WEEK: Read Style Lesson 11

March 10: LECTURE/DISCUSSION: Style Lesson 11  
ACTIVITY POSSIBLE

March 12: DUE: First draft of feature article to me and to your group-mates  
FOR NEXT WEEK: Read PZ Chapters 1 & 2, mark group-mates’ feature articles

March 16 - 22: Spring Break

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1 As with the professional world, deadlines and other items must sometimes be moved or rescheduled. I’ll keep you in the loop, of course, but be ready for anything.
March 24: LECTURE/DISCUSSION: PZ Chapters 1 & 2
ACTIVITY: Meet in final project groups and decide topic/solution

March 26: DUE: Proposal Memo
FOR NEXT WEEK: Read PZ Ch’s 3 - 4, mark group-mates’ feature articles

March 31: DUE: Revision exercise
ACTIVITY: WORKSHOP Feature Articles in groups
LECTURE POSSIBLE

April 2: LECTURE/DISCUSSION: PZ Chapters 3 & 4
ACTIVITY: Meet in groups to work on Final Project
FOR NEXT WEEK: READ PZ Chapters 5 & 6

April 7: ACTIVITY: Final Project group time & groups meet w/ instructor to discuss progress
April 9: LECTURE/DISCUSSION: PZ Chapters 5 & 6
FOR NEXT WEEK: READ PZ Chapters 7 & 8

April 14: ACTIVITY: Continue developing Final Project
LECTURE: PZ Chapters 7 & 8

April 16: DUE: Individual sections of White Paper
ACTIVITY: Groups meet to work on white paper and presentation
REMINDER: Do not wait until White Paper’s done to start presentation prep.
FOR NEXT WEEK: READ PZ Chapters 9 & 10

April 21: DUE: Final draft of feature article
ACTIVITY: Final Project groups meet and work.

April 23: ACTIVITY: Groups meet to work on white paper and presentation

April 28: LECTURE: Oral presentation techniques
ACTIVITY POSSIBLE

April 30: Last day of reg. semester.
LECTURE/DISCUSSION: Brief review for presentation.
ACTIVITIES: Volunteers or flip coin for oral presentation order.
Final group meetings for presentation prep.
Tech check: Groups take turns with overhead to make sure your stuff works.
ACTIVITY: TBD (impromptu speeches)

May 1 - May 5: No classes — reading period, office hours by appointment only.

Final exam period. DUE: Combined “White Paper” report
ACTIVITY: Group Presentations (a.k.a. “pitches”)
LECTURE/DISCUSSION: Course wrap-up.
Email me Project Evaluation Memos within 48 hours.
Reminder: Course Evaluations