



ST. JEROME'S UNIVERSITY

St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo

Department of English

English 378, Winter 2023 (001)

Professional Communications in Statistics and Actuarial Science

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00-2:20 in SJ1 2011

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Mark Spielmacher
Office: Sweeney Hall 2207
Phone: 519-884-8111, extension 28228
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:30-3:30
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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Effective communication and collaboration – skills learned through application and practice – are essential for success in most disciplines, particularly in actuarial science and statistics, fields in which complex information will need to be delivered clearly and occasionally explained to range of audiences from specialists to non-experts. This course primarily involves theory, investigation, practice, and feedback: your writing abilities will be assessed to give you individual direction with respect to what needs to be worked on; you will examine documents written by professionals and explore the needs of people in the discipline; you will consider various audiences (such as colleagues, clients, executives, and the “general public”) in different situations and the use of accessible language and technical concepts where appropriate, along with strategies to reinforce understanding; you will practice editing and revising your work. In order to best meet your own learning needs, you will be offered a range of assignments from which to choose. You will also work collaboratively on some assignments.

REQUIRED TEXTS [AND OTHER REQUIRED/SUGGESTED READINGS]

No textbooks are required. I recommend linking to [Purdue University's Online Writing Lab](#) (OWL).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

Participation and peer editing	Throughout the term	10%
Short bi-weekly assignments	Throughout the term	20%
Critical Analysis	Feb. 2 and Feb. 9	10%
Non-specialist assignment (blog or video)	March 2 and March 9	20%
Short proposal and literature review	March 23	10 %
Executive short report	April 6 and April 10	25%
Reflection assignment	April 10	5%

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

More detailed assignment guidelines will be uploaded to Learn. Consult the schedule for due dates.

Participation and peer editing (10%). Participation in class will be rewarded, both by volunteering answers to questions and by sharing your experiences with your classmates. In Thursday classes, you will be tested on your understanding of lecture material. You will also earn your grade by having assignment drafts ready for peer editing and by providing sincere, constructive peer feedback on your classmate's drafts.

Short bi-weekly assignments (20%). In this case, "bi-weekly" means occurring roughly every two weeks. These short assignments will be worth 5% each, and you will have an opportunity to choose **four out of five**. You may re-write one assignment to improve your grade. I will post a schedule for these short assignments so that you can plan your work accordingly.

Critical analysis (10%). You will have a choice of assignments; these will normally involve reading for salient details, practicing criticism or critical comparison, and demonstrating statistical literacy – showing that you understand the requirements of "specialist" communication in your field. This assignment will be done in two drafts and will be peer edited.

Non-specialist assignment: blog or video (20%). The audience for this assignment is the "general public," such as clients, young people considering career paths, people who want understand some of the implications of what you do, or anyone looking to be informed or inspired about what the future might bring. What this audience has in common is *little to no background in your field of*

study, so you **must apply strategies discussed in class** for explaining the technical content. If you choose to do a blog, you will be encouraged to create an actual online blog (using a free hosting site) that incorporates multimodal elements. If you choose to do a video, you will need to find a partner (such as a classmate or friend or family member) to act as your non-specialist audience. The ten-minute video will demonstrate your ability to employ various strategies to explain a technical concept in a way that your audience can understand and demonstrate engagement with the audience. This assignment will be peer edited or reviewed. You may work with a partner on this assignment.

Proposal, literature review, and executive short report (35% total). Often executives, policy-makers, and other important folks will rely on you to read technical literature in order to explain the content and the repercussions of changes in the field and to make recommendations. This **collaborative** project will be done in stages. First, you and your partner will write a brief proposal (10%) explaining your audience, purpose, and proposed sources of information (in an annotated bibliography). You will also share your proposal with a few classmates for feedback. Finally, you and your partner will produce a brief report (25%) that summarizes and incorporates the research findings in order to make specific recommendations to your target audience. The language you use in the report will be less technical: semi-specialist readers have their own areas of expertise and will not always share your understanding of concepts and specific training. The report will be done in two drafts.

Reflection Assignment (5%). With reference to guiding questions, you will write honestly and critically about your experiences in the course: what you learned or at least considered while looking at course materials and completing assignments.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Topics	Assignment Due
Jan. 10 & 12	Course introduction: Ways of thinking about communication for different audiences	
Jan. 17 & 19	Common grammatical issues and concise writing	Bi-weekly assignment 1 will be assigned Thursday and due Monday, Jan. 23
Jan. 24 & 26	Specialist communication	Critical analysis assigned
Jan. 32 & Feb. 2	Organization, clarity, document usability	Peer editing of critical analysis drafts (Feb. 2).
Feb. 7 & 9	Non-specialist communication, multimodality, strategies for explaining difficult concepts	Final draft of critical analysis due Feb. 9.
Feb. 14 & 16	Workplace communications and working collaboratively	Non-specialist blog or video assigned
Feb. 28 & March 2	Presentation skills	Peer editing or review of blog or video assignment (March 2)
March 7 & 9	Semi-specialist communication	Blog/Video assignment due (March 9)
March 14 & 16	Research skills and documentation of sources, writing proposals	Final project assigned
March 21 & 23	Reports and white papers	Proposal/research review due for peer approval (March 23)
March 28 & 30	Reflection writing	
April 4 & 6	Peer editing of report drafts	Peer editing of report drafts (April 6). Final report due April 10. Reflection assignment due by or before April 10.

IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

There will be no classes held during the study break (third week of February).

POLICY ON LATE WORK, MISSED ASSIGNMENTS, AND MAKE-UP TESTS

If you find that you will be unable to submit assigned work by the listed deadlines, I would appreciate being informed with an explanation (although you do not have to provide details that are too personal). With respect to drafts, it is extremely important to do your best to have something ready for peer editing to avoid getting too far behind. It is your responsibility to make sure that all work is completed.

RULES FOR GROUP WORK IN ASSIGNMENTS

When working on a group assignment, a [Group Assignment Checklist](#) must be completed and submitted with the assignment.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance in all classes is mandatory. .5/10 will be deducted for each unwarranted absence from class. Let me know if you are unable to attend class, and explain your reason.

ELECTRONIC DEVICE POLICY

Laptops may be used for taking notes and for working on English 378 assignments when class time is assigned for such work. All other uses of devices, including phones, is discouraged. Please silence your phones and avoid the temptation to text, play games, watch videos, check news sites, or anything else that will be seen as disengagement from what is happening in the classroom.

CORRESPONDENCE

Students using e-mail to contact me must include their first and last names, student number, and course section in which they are enrolled in the e-mail subject line. E-mails composed in this course must be formally and professionally written.

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information.

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read the St. Jerome's University Policy on [Student Petitions and Grievances](#). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the St. Jerome's Advising Specialist, Student Affairs Office, who will provide further assistance.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for their actions. Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under the St. Jerome's University Policy on [Student Discipline](#). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to University of Waterloo [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties, check the [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to the St. Jerome's University Policy on [Student Appeals](#).

Note for students with disabilities: [AccessAbility Services](#), located in Needles Hall (Room 1401) at the University of Waterloo, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.