



ST. JEROME'S UNIVERSITY

St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo

Department of English

English 378:

Professional Communications in Statistics and Actuarial Science (005)

FALL 2022

Instructor: Mark Spielmacher msspielm@uwaterloo.ca

Meeting Times: Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:00 - 11:20

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:30 - 12:30 in Sweeney Hall 2207

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 may also work collaboratively on some assignments. In the event of a COVID-19 lockdown, I will be ready to deliver course material through video presentations uploaded to Learn.

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	Oct 6 and Oct 16	10%
Non-specialist assignment (blog or video)	Nov 3 and Nov 10	20%
Short proposal and literature review	Nov 24	10 %
Executive short report	Dec 6 and Dec 12	25%
Reflection assignment	Dec 12	5%

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

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

Participation and peer editing (10%). Every week for the first several weeks, I will ask you to post your thoughts – and respond to your classmates’ ideas – in a discussion forum on Learn as a supplement to classroom discussion. My goal is to get you communicating among yourselves; I may contribute my thoughts from time to time, but my role will mostly be to observe. 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. This assignment may be done with a partner.

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
Sept 8	Course introduction	Remember to respond to the weekly discussion questions. Bi-weekly writing assignments will also be assigned throughout the term, so don't forget to complete these!
Sept 13 and 15	Ways of thinking about communication for different audiences	
Sept 20 and 22	Common grammatical issues and concise writing	
Sept 27 and 29	Specialist communication	Critical analysis assigned
Oct 4 and 6	Organization, clarity, document usability	Peer editing of critical analysis drafts (Oct 6). Please submit your final draft by Oct 16.
Oct 18 and 20	Non-specialist communication, multimodality, strategies for explaining difficult concepts	
Oct 25 and 27	Workplace communications and working collaboratively	Non-specialist blog or video assigned
Nov 1 and 3	Presentation skills	Peer editing or review of blog or video assignment (Nov 3)
Nov 8 and 10	Semi-specialist communication	Blog/Video assignment due (Nov 10)
Nov 15 and 17	Research skills and documentation of sources, writing proposals	Final project assigned
Nov 22 and 24	Reports and white papers	Proposal/research review due (Nov 24)
Nov 29 and Dec 1	Reflection writing and concluding remarks	
Dec 6	Peer editing of report drafts	Final report due Dec 12. Reflection assignment due by or before Dec 12.

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; although I *may* send one reminder e-mail if I notice something has not been submitted, I will not generally send repeat reminders.

RULES FOR GROUP WORK IN ASSIGNMENTS

When you work collaboratively on the video and report assignment, you must complete and sign a Group Assignment Checklist:

https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/sites/ca.arts/files/uploads/files/group_assignment_disclosure.pdf

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.

Mental Health Support: The Faculty of Math encourages students to seek out mental health support if needed.

On-campus Resources:

- Campus Wellness <https://uwaterloo.ca/campus-wellness/>
- Counselling Services: counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca 519-888-4567 ext 32655
- MATES: one-to-one peer support program offered by Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA) and Counselling Services: mates@wusa.ca
- Health Services: located across the creek from the Student Life Centre, 519-888-4096.

Off-campus Resources:

- Good2Talk (24/7): Free confidential help line for post-secondary students. Phone: 1-866-925-5454 (Ontario and Nova Scotia only)
- Here 24/7: Mental Health and Crisis Service Team. Phone: 1-844-437-3247

(Waterloo Region only)

- OK2BME: set of support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning teens. Phone: 519-884-0000 extension 213 (Waterloo Region only)
- EMPOWER ME 1-833-628-5589 for Cdn./USA other countries see: http://studentcare.ca/rte/en/IHaveAPlan_WUSA_EmpowerMe_EmpowerMe
 - EMPOWER ME in China:

China North 108007142831

China South 108001402851

Diversity: It is our intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, and that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class. We recognize the immense value of the diversity in identities, perspectives, and contributions that students bring, and the benefit it has on our educational environment. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let us know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. In particular:

- We will gladly honour your request to address you by an alternate/preferred name or gender pronoun. Please advise us of this preference early in the term so we may make appropriate changes to our records.
- We will honour your religious holidays and celebrations. Please inform of us these at the start of the course.
- We will follow AccessAbility Services guidelines and protocols on how to best support students with different learning needs.

ACCOMODATIONS/VERIFICATION OF ILLNESS FORMS (VIF)/SELF-DECLARATION UPDATES

Review the Faculty of Mathematics' [Accommodations](#) webpage, which was updated in fall 2020 and maintains current and clear information for students about the process.

MATH ASSIGNMENT PLANNER

The [Math Assignment planner](#) provides students with step by step guidance for the completion of their assignments. This planner has been developed in collaboration with the Faculty of Math, the Student Success Office and the Library and is now live on the [Library's website](#).

The math assignment planner helps students:

- Break down math assignments into manageable steps based on due dates
- Allocate time appropriately towards the completion of the assignment which reduces the procrastination and cramming cycle
- Incorporate time to get help on difficult questions which may reduce cheating/sourcing answers
- Consider steps in completing assignments that they may not normally consider (i.e. taking time to understand the questions, taking time to review the material before attempting the questions, etc.)
- Recognize the importance of taking time to consolidate understanding of the content
- Appreciate the importance of reviewing marked assignments