



ST. JEROME'S
UNIVERSITY

St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo
Department of English
ENGL 378
Professional Communications in Statistics and Actuarial Science
Winter 2023

Instructor Information

Instructor: Jesse Hutchison
Office: Sweeney Hall, Room 2114
Office Hours: MW 2:30-3:30 PM
Email: j6hutchi@uwaterloo.ca

Course Description

Clear and effective communication is a crucial component of any field. This course endeavours to provide you with the tools you will need to successfully deliver material to both experts and non-experts. This means improving on the basic fundamentals of communication. In the first part of the course, then, we will discuss various strategies to communicate in various genres in a way that is professional, critical, concise, and precise. You will also learn how to craft information for different audiences, from specialists, with whom you can use more technical and specialized language, to non-specialists, to whom you will have to relay difficult concepts in a way that is accessible. We will also emphasize the importance of teamwork as your final assignment will be to produce a major group project on a subject of your choice. In working towards this final project, we will consider the significance of presenting information in front of a live audience, as well as the importance of research and editing.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- A. Identify and synthesize arguments and relevant points from published material
- B. Be aware of different audiences who require statistical information and be able to communicate effectively to those different audiences
- C. Write critically, concisely, and persuasively; speak professionally and engagingly
- D. Work collaboratively with a team to produce a well-organized and professional document

Required Text

There is no required textbook for the class; however, I will be putting up material on LEARN for you to read.

Course Requirements and Assessment

Assessment	Date of Evaluation	Weighting
Participation/Attendance		10%
Citation Assignment	January 18	5%
Grammar Assignment	January 25	5%
Reviewing a Scholarly Article	February 6	10%
Cover Letter Assignment	February 13	5%
E-Mail Assignment	February 27	10%
Video Presentation	March 6	10%
Group Proposal Presentation	March 15-March 22	15%
Final Project Draft	April 3	2.5%
Peer Feedback	April 5	2.5%
Final Project	April 12	25%

Participation/Attendance (10%): A vital component of workplace or academic communication is interpersonal, and it is advantageous to be able to communicate with your colleagues. Consequently, part of your grade will assess your attendance and participation. When grading attendance/participation, each class, students will receive an automatic 7.5/10 for on-time attendance (this mark will be impacted depending on the degree of lateness). If students meaningfully participate in class (meaning at least one “more-than-one-word” contribution to the class discussion), the attendance/participation mark will be bumped up to 10/10 for the day. Please also avoid any potential distractions (meaning no social media, texting or having off-topic chat with friends).

One of your participation/attendance marks will be based on your response to the class presentations from March 15-March 22. Your group will be chosen to respond to

another group following their presentation. Your participation can be asking a question about the specifics of the project (for example, you can ask why they are interested in the topic or why they chose the particular focus they did), you can ask them to discuss more about one of the articles they mentioned, you can ask them to clarify particular components of the presentation that may have been a bit unclear, you can make suggestions about what ideas to pursue or other aspects of their topic they can focus on, etc. Simply saying that you liked (or didn't like) certain aspects will not count. Moreover, your question should demonstrate that you actively listened to their presentation. Remember to be polite and respectful – an impolite or disrespectful response will also not count as a response. If learning shifts online, we will hold classes in the Virtual Classroom on LEARN for the days of the presentation and attendance will be required.

If we are not in class and learning shifts online, I will create a forum on LEARN where I will place a weekly question for you to respond to. To find the forum, click the Connect tab and then click on Discussions. In this online format, your participation/attendance grade will be an assessment of your contributions to these topics. If we are online, I will put up a new thread every Monday, so if you are contributing to that week's thread, you will need to respond by the Sunday evening before the next thread is due to go up. Your contributions to a thread will only be marked if you contribute to the discussion the week it has been made available. Write a paragraph or two (paragraphs should be between 100-250 words) where you address the question. Just remember to be kind, courteous, respectful and friendly even if disagreeing. This will only receive a mark if you follow these instructions.

Citation Assignment (5%): For this assignment, I will place a text on LEARN that you will examine in order to determine what is cited properly and what is cited improperly, as per our class discussions. The citation assignment will be submitted to the LEARN dropbox by 11:59 on **January 18**.

Grammar Assignment (5%): This assignment asks you to point out the grammatical errors (sentence fragments, comma splices, misuse of semi-colons, etc.) in a text that I will place on LEARN. The grammar assignment will be submitted to the LEARN dropbox by 11:59 on **January 25**.

Reviewing a Scholarly Article (10%): There are three articles posted on LEARN in a tab titled "Articles for Reviewing a Scholarly Article Assignment." Choose ONE of the articles and in 150-200 words, identify 3 features (and give supporting quoted evidence along with a page number from the article where required) that adhere to the formal requirements of a scholarly article written for specialist audiences as per our discussion

on the features of scholarly papers on January 27th. Simply name the feature and provide a quotation from the article that demonstrates the feature – no explanation beyond that is necessary. Remember that while the IMRAD structure and an abstract are features, these will not count as features to discuss for this assignment. This element of the assignment will be worth 3 out of 10 points.

Then in 300-400 of your own words, write a critical analysis of the article (worth 7 out of 10 points). We will discuss Critical Thinking on January 30th. In creating your analysis, consider the following possibilities: why the author(s) approach is sensible (or not), why their analysis is appropriate (or not), and why the communication of their findings is effective (or not). What might be the potential gaps where researchers can further this analysis? You do not have to consider all of these things, and in fact you can even focus in on one, but they may be helpful in motivating your critical analysis. Moreover, you will want to avoid simply agreeing with the argument. The assignment will be submitted to the LEARN dropbox by 11:59pm on **February 6**.

Cover Letter (5%): For this assignment, I will upload a couple of job opportunities on LEARN. You will choose one of these and write a 200-300 word one page cover letter for the job. You will be assessed on your use of information from the lecture on cover letters as well as for structure, clarity, and consideration of audience. The assignment will be submitted to the LEARN dropbox by 11:59pm on **February 13**.

E-mail Assignment (10%): For this assignment, I will upload an e-mail response of an actuarial manager who works at a life insurance company to a policyholder. You will critique the response in 200-250 words and write a more appropriate response in roughly 200 words. You will be assessed on the strength and clarity of your critique and response (based on our discussions in lecture) as well as your techniques of persuasion. The assignment will be submitted to the LEARN dropbox by 11:59pm on **February 27**.

Video Presentation (10%): At some point in your career, you may have to explain technical ideas to non-specialists in person, either in presentations or in one-on-one meetings. For this assignment, you will create a short (between 3-5 minute) video, using your phone or computer camera in which a suitably technical (university level) mathematics concept (anything related to your field) is explained/simplified in non-math terms (no jargon or equations). This presentation might take the form of an informal presentation like a TED talk or a 3-minute thesis speech. Ultimately though, you should be the one on-screen. If you have the technical know-how to incorporate visual elements, you may do that, but it is not required. I will be assessing how well you have simplified your concept, how well you have applied the strategies discussed in the videos on both narratives/storytelling and oral presentation, clarity, use of time, and

enthusiasm for the subject. The more enthusiastic the better. Please keep in mind too that the rules of academic integrity also apply to this assignment; this assignment, in part, is about strengthening your ability to translate a difficult topic for a broad audience. Therefore, the discussion and examples you use should be your own and NOT taken from other sources. That said, if you have happened to have gone to a source in the process of coming up with your idea, you should provide a link to the source along with your upload. If you have used any direct wording from a source, you need to make it clear within the speech of your video when you are quoting from, or paraphrasing, someone else's work. Again, though, you are discouraged from using outside sources for this assignment. Videos should be uploaded to LEARN by 11:59pm (or a file with a link to the video should be submitted on LEARN) on **March 6**.

Group Proposal Presentation (15%): Roughly halfway through the term, I will place you into a group if we are online or you will join a group of four or five if we are in class. As a group, you will present in class (or, if we are online, in the Virtual Classroom) a fifteen-to-twenty minute proposal for your final project. Remember that you will need to be proposing something manageable and researchable for either your final report or final white paper. Your presentation should begin with a very brief introduction, describe whether you are proposing a white paper or a research project, what your topic is, what your focus is on that topic (for example: gambling is a topic, but a focus might be the problems with trying to beat the casino while playing roulette), and what tentative conclusions you expect to reach. You should also name and briefly discuss three legitimate sources that you have already found and read (based on our March 6th discussion) in order to convey the conversation that is occurring on this topic but also how your project will distinguish itself within this conversation. You should describe what methods you are using to find information and/or obtain results and then conclude the presentation.

On the day of your presentation, you will upload a version of your presentation (either the slides or notes that you used) to LEARN before 11:59 PM. The presentation will be marked out of 15. 4 points will go towards your successful incorporation of all elements described above, 4 points will go towards your group's presentation style and clarity, 3 points will go towards your management of time (presentations should avoid being over or under the time limit), 2 points will go towards your response to the questions (see the note on the questions under the attendance/participation section), 2 points will go towards successfully uploading your presentation notes on time. The presentation order will be chosen at random (though odds are you will either be presenting or posing questions on one of the presentation days). The presentations will take place (and the notes/slides will be uploaded to LEARN) from **March 15th to March 22nd**.

Final Project Draft (2.5%): On April 3rd, you will submit a draft of your final project to the discussion forum for peer feedback. This is a low-stakes draft, meaning, it will not be graded for the strength of its content. Rather, the point is to get feedback from your colleagues before submitting a final version. However, you will be graded for fulfilling certain criteria. The draft should include 200-300 words per person (not point-form); if your group is submitting a report, the draft should contain at least elements of an introduction, methodology, and results section. If your group is submitting a white paper, the draft should include elements an introduction (with a well-defined problem) and at least two solutions. Your draft is worth 2.5% but will be graded out of 5 (5 marks for submitting assignment on-time complete to specs outlined above, 3 marks for submitting on-time but incomplete OR submitted late but before April 5th, 2 marks for submitting late but before April 5th AND incomplete, 0 marks if not submitted before April 5th). **Due in the discussion forums before 11:59PM on April 3rd.**

Peer Feedback (2.5%): You are asked to provide feedback on the final project draft for the same group that you responded to during the presentations. Your feedback should be 50-100 words long (not point form) and should provide at least one example of the strengths of the draft and one suggestion on how to improve/one error that you have spotted. Moreover, it should not repeat information that anyone else has posted. The review is worth 2.5%, but it will be graded out of 5 (5 marks for responding by April 5th complete to specs outlined above, 3 marks for submitting by April 5th but incomplete, 2 marks for submitting late but before the end of April 11th, 1 mark for submitting incomplete AND late but before the end of April 11th, 0 marks for submitting after April 11th). **Due in the discussion forum before 11:59PM on April 5th.**

Final Project (25%): Collaborating with team members, you will produce a research document or white paper related to actuarial science or statistics that is written for a semi-specialist or non-specialist audience. The project should make use of at least five legitimate and authoritative sources. This means that you will not just list these sources in a reference section but that you will also demonstrate engagement with them within the body of the project. Each member of the group will contribute approximately 600-650 words of the document. You will also work together to review and edit the material so that it is consistent in terms of content, style, and formatting. There should be an emphasis placed on the editing process, to make sure that the overall proposal is clear, cohesive, consistently formatted, and avoids issues of academic integrity. The final grade will consider the appropriateness and application of the research and depth of analysis, the appropriateness of the style for the audience, and the overall clarity and concision of the writing. Remember to also submit the Group Assignment Checklist (see description below). Because the work is collaborative in nature, the intention is that

every student will receive the same grade. However, I will give the option if you wish to be graded independently. The final project should be uploaded to LEARN on **April 12th**.

Alternate Arrangements for Online Learning

If we end up switching to online, we will stick to our Tuesday/Thursday routine and keep to the schedule outlined below. Rather than meet in class, I will upload a video on the topic that is scheduled that day. You will be responsible for viewing the video in a timely fashion. The method for assessing your participation/attendance grade will also change. I describe this change in detail in the participation/attendance section. If we remain in class, you will be choosing your own groups for the two projects due closer to the end of term. If we are not in class, I may have to organize you into groups of four or five myself. If you are self-isolating at any point that we are in class, I can provide you with videos on the topic that we are discussing that day.

Late Work

All assignments are to be handed in on LEARN by 11:59PM of the due date. Microsoft Word documents are preferred over PDF and Pages (the latter I am unable to open on my computer). Marks will be returned on LEARN. Late papers will be subject to a late penalty of 2% per day. Assignments more than 20 days late will not be accepted with the exception of the final project which has a 5 day cut-off. Also, the late penalties for the draft and the peer feedback are different. Please see the description of these assignments to see their particular late rules.

A doctor's note is required to avoid a late penalty, and it should document serious illness on and for the period directly preceding the due date for assignments.

In cases of personal matters such as mental health concerns, I am very sympathetic, but I am also unable to properly evaluate these cases. If you need an extension on work for such issues, it is crucial to connect with AccessAbility Services, who are still available by phone or online during this period and have them evaluate your case. They can then contact me if they believe you require alternate accommodations for assignments. At that point, I am always happy to help the student in any way that I can.

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

If we are meeting in class, attendance will be mandatory unless you provide documentation that excuses you from class or unless AccessAbility Services contacts me to provide alternate arrangements. If you are unable to attend due to COVID-like

symptoms and required self-isolation, you will need to self-declare your illness by filling out the University of Waterloo Verification of Illness form:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/quest/help/students/how-do-i/self-declare-my-illness>

Office Hours

My office hours for this term, will be Monday and Wednesday 2:30-3:30PM. Feel free to drop by my office during that time. If we are online, please email me to book an appointment during that time and I will send you a Zoom link.

Email

I respond to my emails every week day until 4:30PM. I may not be able to respond right away, or I may be looking into the matter on your behalf, but I will get back to you as soon as possible. Remember though that if you send an email regarding an assignment the day that assignment is due, that I may not see it until the following morning. If you have not received a response after 24 hours, or roughly 48 hours on a weekend, please email me again. Please note that mail from some external email servers, such as Hotmail or Yahoo, may be bounced by the university server.

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.

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 semester 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.

Course Outline/Class Schedule:

January 9: Introduction

January 11: Academic Integrity

January 16: Style, Voice, Concision

Citation Assignment due January 18

January 18: Grammar

January 23: Audience

Grammar Assignment due January 25

January 25: Reading: "Are the Dead Taking Over Facebook?"

January 30: Critical Thinking

February 1: Rhetoric

Reviewing a Scholarly Article Assignment due February 6

February 6: Cover Letters

February 8: Emails

Cover Letter Assignment due February 13

February 13: Readings: "Using narratives and storytelling to communicate science with non-specialist audiences,"

February 15: Vlog Discussion

February 18-February 26: Reading Week

Email Assignment due February 27

February 27: Reports

March 1: White Papers, forming groups,

Video Presentation due March 6

March 6: Research Tips

March 8: Presentation Tips

March 13: Workshop for Presentation

March 15: **Presentations**

March 20: **Presentations**

March 22: **Presentations**, Integrating Quotations

March 27: Common Errors on Final Project

March 29: Workshop for Final Project

April 3: Peer Review Discussion, Workshop for Final Project, **Draft of Final Project Due**

April 5: Final Thoughts, Evaluations, **Peer Feedback Due**

Final Project due April 12