



**ST. JEROME'S**  
**UNIVERSITY**

**St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo**

Department of English

English 378 / Math Elective 300: Professional Communications in  
Statistics and Actuarial Science (001 and 002), **FALL 2021** (online)

Instructor: Mark Spielmacher [msspielm@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:msspielm@uwaterloo.ca)

Office Hours: we will need to stay in touch by e-mail or by on-line video appointments.

**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. Because we will not be meeting in person, I will be delivering the information via PowerPoint presentations and short videos.

**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	15%
Short bi-weekly assignments (choice)	Throughout the term	20%
Critical Analysis	Sept. 30 and Oct. 7	10%
Non-specialist assignment (blog or video)	Oct. 28 and Nov. 4	20%
Short report proposal and literature review	Nov. 18	5%
Executive short report	Dec. 2 and Dec. 8	25%
Reflection assignment	Dec. 8	5%

## ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

More detailed guidelines will be provided for the assignments.

**Participation and peer editing (15%).** Every week for the first several weeks, I will ask you to post your thoughts in a discussion forum on Learn as an alternative 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 from six in total. You may re-write one assignment to improve your grade. I will post a schedule for all of these assignments so that you can plan your work accordingly

**Critical analysis (10%).** You will be given a choice of assignments; these will normally involve reading for salient details; practicing criticism, statistical analysis, or critical comparison; or 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 will need to 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 will also demonstrate engagement with the audience. This assignment will be peer edited or reviewed.

**Proposal, literature review, and executive short report (30% total).** Often executives, policy-makers, and other important folks will rely on you to read the technical literature in order to explain the content and the repercussions of changes in the field and to make recommendations. This project will be done in stages. First, you will write a brief proposal (5%) explaining your audience, purpose, and proposed sources of information (research/literature review). You will also share your proposal with a few classmates for feedback. Finally, you 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. This final assignment 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

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Assignment due</b>
Sept. 7 & 8	Course introduction and ways of thinking about communication	Remember to respond to the weekly guiding questions. Bi-weekly writing assignments will also be assigned, so don't forget to complete these!
Sept. 14	Common grammatical issues Concise writing	
Sept. 21	Specialist communication	Critical analysis assigned
Sept. 28	Organization, clarity, document usability	<b>Peer editing of critical analysis drafts (Sept. 30)</b>
Oct. 5	Non-specialist communication, multimodality, strategies for explaining difficult concepts	<b>Due date for critical analysis (Oct. 7)</b>
Oct. 19	Workplace communications Collaborative work	Non-specialist blog or video assigned
Oct. 26	Presentation skills	<b>Peer editing or review of blog or video assignment (Oct. 28)</b>
Nov. 2	Semi-specialist communication	<b>Blog/Video assignment due (Nov. 4)</b>
Nov. 9	Research skills and documentation of sources, writing proposals	Final project assigned
Nov. 16	Report writing	<b>Proposal/research review due (Nov. 18)</b>
Nov. 23	Reflection writing	
Nov. 30	Concluding remarks	<b>Peer editing of report drafts (Dec. 2)</b>
		<b>Final report and reflection due Dec. 8</b>

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

Based on experience teaching remotely during the pandemic, I plan to be reasonably flexible with due dates. However, if you find that you will be unable to submit assigned work by the listed deadlines, I would appreciate being informed. With respect to drafts, it is very important to do your best to have something ready for peer editing to avoid getting too far behind. Any other issues will be considered on a case-by-case basis. 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**

If you choose to work collaboratively on the video and/or report assignment, please let me know of your intentions, and I will ask both collaborators to sign a Group Assignment Checklist:

[https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/sites/ca.arts/files/uploads/files/group\\_assignment\\_disclosure.pdf](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/](http://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, [www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/upload\\_file/PLCY\\_AOM\\_Student-Petitions-and-Grievances\\_20151211-SJUSCapproved.pdf](http://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/upload_file/PLCY_AOM_Student-Petitions-and-Grievances_20151211-SJUSCapproved.pdf). 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/](http://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.

[Policy 71](#) allows for instructors who discover or are provided with evidence of academic offences to seek an informal resolution directly with the student. If an agreement is reached, the proposed resolution must be reported to the Integrity Officer at [integrity.officer.math@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:integrity.officer.math@uwaterloo.ca), and is still subject to the approval of the Assistant Dean for Students (or, in cases involving graduate students, the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies). Note that this approval may depend upon how closely the proposed resolution matches established precedent, the [Guidelines](#) attached to Policy 71, and whether the student has any previous offences on their record.

**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, [www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY\\_AOM\\_Student-Appeals\\_20131122-SJUSApproved.pdf](http://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Appeals_20131122-SJUSApproved.pdf).

**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, [www.uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/).

**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](mailto: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](mailto: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