



Department of English
English 378 / Math Elective 300 (001):
Professional Communication in Statistics and Actuarial Science (Fall 2018)
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:00 – 11:20 in SJ1 2011

Instructor: Mark Spielmacher msspielm@uwaterloo.ca 519-884-8110, ext. 28228

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:45-12:45 in Sweeney Hall 2207

Course Description

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 non-experts. This course primarily involves 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, 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; finally, you will collaborate to propose a meaningful project related to current and important topics in the field, conduct research, and present your findings in a professional report. Be prepared to collaborate with your peers in order to develop ideas and to offer (and accept) constructive criticism.

Required Texts

No textbooks are required for the course. From time to time you may be assigned readings which will be available as Web links on Learn. I recommend that you bookmark [Purdue University's Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](#).

Course Requirements and Assessment

Participation and Peer Assessment	Throughout the term	15%
Professional Profile	Sept. 27 (draft 1), Oct. 2 (final draft)	10%
Team Project Proposal	Oct. 11 (presentation), Oct. 18 (draft 1) and Oct. 30 (final draft)	20%
Summary	Oct. 25 (draft 1), Nov. 1 (final draft)	5%
Blog	Nov. 8 (draft 1), Nov. 13 (final draft)	10%
Critical Review	Nov. 15	5%
Team Project Article and Abstract	Nov. 29 (draft 1), Dec 4 (draft 2)	30%
Reflection assignment	Dec. 4	5%

Attendance and participation (15%)

Earn your grade by being in class regularly (and on time), showing a willingness to make earnest and thoughtful contributions to class discussions, being prepared with completed work when expected, and making sincere and constructive criticisms of peers' work. Chronic absences, lateness, disruptions, sleeping, game-playing, texting, YouTube watching, working on math assignments, and similar types of distracting/disengaged conduct will deflate the grade.

Professional Profile (10%)

For this assignment you will select a person (not yourself) working in the field of statistics or actuarial science: this can be someone you admire for his or her contributions to the field, someone who has gained popularity in the news, a professor who has inspired you, or any other relevant person you can think of. Find out as much as you can about the person and compose a profile (500-750 words) that highlights information such as their areas of specialization, approaches to work, education and work history, and publications. You may work with a partner on this assignment. Draft one is due Sept. 27 for in-class peer editing; the final draft is due Oct. 2.

Team Project Proposal (20%)

Collaborating with team members, you will narrow down a general topic and propose a major written research document related to actuarial science/statistics and designed for a non-specialist audience. Research sources should primarily be secondary, current, and authoritative empirical studies. The project may not be based on work done in other courses, infringe on copyright or intellectual property, or be legally ambiguous. I will refrain from interfering too much in the brainstorming process (I'm much more interested in what you come up with), but I will be available for discussion. First, your team will create a proposal to be presented to your classmates and instructor for approval. In your proposal, various parameters will be addressed (why the project is important, how and why your research approach will result in a useful end product, and so on). Proposal work will begin in week four; proposal presentations will take place on Oct. 11. Teams will also produce a written proposal on Oct. 18 for peer editing and submission; the final draft is due on Oct. 30. Be prepared for criticism and requests for revisions before being allowed to proceed with the project. For example, if the topic seems unrelated to your discipline, if the scope seems too narrow (or too broad), if the distribution of work seems unbalanced, if the approach seems too opinion-based rather than empirical, you will need to adjust the project.

Summary (5%)

You will be given a selection of source texts to choose from (Oct. 16). This assignment will test your ability to read for the most salient details from the text and provide a concise version of those details in your own words. A draft of this assignment is due Oct. 25 for in-class peer editing; the final draft is due Nov. 1.

Blog Assignment (10%)

This assignment will require you (and a partner, if you wish) to familiarize yourself with several popular blogs pertaining to mathematical topics in order to get a sense of the style and common features of the form. Create a blogger moniker and conceive of a thematic design for your blog page; finally, compose a blog entry (300-400 words) on a current issue in the field. A draft is due Nov. 8 for peer editing; the final draft is due Nov. 13.

Critical Review (5%)

For this assignment you will examine a published paper and provide a critique of its features. Guiding questions will be provided to assist you in composing your critical review. This assignment will be done in class on Nov. 15.

Team Project Document (25%) and Abstract (5%)

This document must be collaboratively written: teams are not permitted to assign the writing of the entire document to one or two members only. Each team member is expected to produce between 250 and 350 words of the document. Teams should read representative texts from several online sources written for general audiences in order to get a clear sense of the style and approach. Working together, team members should

ensure that the work is stylistically consistent and appropriate for a general audience. The team must also produce an abstract for the document. A draft of the document is due in class on Nov. 29 for peer editing. The final draft is due on Dec. 4.

Reflection Assignment (5%)

This final assignment will require that you write honestly and critically about your experiences in the course: your assignments, your class contributions, your engagement with your team – and what you learned or considered (whether it validates your own experience or contradicts it). Guiding questions will be provided to help you compose this final assignment (250-300 words), due Dec. 4.

Late Work

Normally, late assignments submitted without a reasonable excuse will be penalized 2% per day; politely-explained excuses along with appropriate documentation where possible (or at least reasonable advance notice) may justify an extension. Written assignments must be entirely the student's own work, with clear citations and references where necessary.

Electronic Device Policy

Ringling and vibrating devices—as well as tablets and laptops when not used for classroom work—can cause distractions for me and for those students who are conscientious about participating in the lecture. Leave your devices turned off unless you require them for note-taking only.

Important Information

Academic Integrity: To maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo and its Affiliated and Federated Institutions of Waterloo (AFIW) are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. See the [UWaterloo Academic Integrity](#) webpage for more information.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their actions. 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 professor, 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 offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to [University of Waterloo Policy 71 - Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

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](#).

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: The [AccessAbility Services](#) office, located on the first floor of the Needles

Hall extension (1401), 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 the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.

Course Outline / Class Schedule

Week 1	September 11: course introduction – general and ethical principles of writing in science-based disciplines	September 13: writing ethics, short written introduction
Week 2	September 18: team project start, understanding audience, research and writing, argumentation; professional profile assigned	September 20: formation of teams, preliminary project work
Week 3	September 25: narrative and other writing strategies	September 27: professional profile assignment workshop: bring a hard copy draft to class for peer editing
Week 4	October 2: creating persuasive proposals; submit professional profile assignment	October 4: presentation skills
Week 5	October 9: no class (study break)	October 11: proposal presentations and peer review
Week 6	October 16: summarizing content, in-class activity, summary assigned	October 18: proposal workshop: teams must bring a hard copy of their project proposal for peer editing
Week 7	October 23: first draft of proposal returned – proposal revision workshop	October 25: summary workshop: bring a hard copy of your summary for peer editing
Week 8	October 30: public communication of science (blogs and other sources of popular readership), multimodal media, final draft of proposal due. Blog assigned.	November 1: blog workshop. Final draft of summary due.
Week 9	November 6: visual rhetoric and incorporating visuals in writing, common problems with visual information	November 8: bring a copy of your blog assignment for peer editing
Week 10	November 13: critical review of published writing (structural, linguistic, rhetorical). Final draft of blog due.	November 15: critical review assignment.
Week 11	November 20: concise writing	November 22: collaborative writing
Week 12	November 27: copy-editing, hunting for common errors	November 29: project workshop – bring a copy of your team’s final document and abstract for peer editing