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**Department of English**  
**English 378 / Math Elective 300 (001):**  
**Professional Communication in Statistics and Actuarial Science (Winter 2019)**  
**Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:30-12:50 in SJ1 2011**

**Instructor:** Mark Spielmacher [msspielm@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:msspielm@uwaterloo.ca) 519-884-8110, ext. 28228

**Office hours:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:15-2:15 in Sweeney Hall 2207; I will frequently be in the office on Mondays and Wednesdays – e-mail me to confirm

### 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.

### Required Texts

No textbooks are required for the course. I recommend [Purdue University's Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](#).

### Course Requirements and Assessment

Participation and peer editing	Throughout the term	15%
In-class summary assignment	January 24	5%
Critical review	Begun in class Jan. 31, submitted to D2L by Feb. 3	5%
Memo assignment	Begun in class Feb. 7, submitted to D2L by Feb. 10	5%
Blog or vlog assignment	Begun in class Feb. 14 and submitted to D2L by Feb. 24	10%
Team project proposal	Draft 1 due March 19 for peer editing, draft 2 due March 21	15%
Research update and progress reports	March 21 and 28	10%
Team Report or White Paper	Draft 1 due April 4 for peer editing, draft 2 due April 9 (D2L)	30%
Reflection Assignment	Due April 9	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. Please bear in mind that many assignments will be done (or at least begun) in class.

**Summary (5%).** You will be given a selection of source texts to choose from (Jan. 24). 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. The assignment will be done in class. More details will be provided.

**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 started in class on Jan. 31, and you may work with a partner to generate information. Each classmate will submit an individual assignment to the D2L dropbox by 4:30 pm on Feb. 3. More details will be provided.

**Memo assignment (5%).** Often executives, policy-makers and other important folks will rely on you to read the technical literature in order to explain the repercussions and/or make recommendations. For this assignment, you will be given a scenario and asked to examine texts in order to write a brief persuasive memo in a business context. More details will be provided.

**Blog or Vlog Assignment (10%).**

Option 1 (Blog): This assignment will require you to familiarize yourself with several popular blogs (particularly those pertaining to mathematics) in order to get a sense of the style and common features of the form. It will also require you to interview a classmate who will become the subject of your blog. Find out what motivates and inspires the individual and what their plans are for the future. Write a feature profile that presents the individual as an important up-and-coming contributor to the field, a rising star, a “mover and shaker.” Create a blogger moniker and conceive of a thematic design for your blog page. More details will be provided.

Option 2 (Vlog): This assignment will require a partner, and both will receive the same grade. Create a short (no more than 10-minute) video in which an expert explains a technical concept to a non-specialist, using various strategies that will be discussed in class. The classmate playing the role of the non-specialist will occasionally interrupt with questions. A checklist of required features will be provided. Your video may be shown in class! The assignment will be submitted to the dropbox by 4:30 pm on Feb. 24.

**Team Project Proposal (15%).** 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 semi-specialist or non-specialist audience. Research sources should primarily be secondary, current, and authoritative empirical studies. First, your team will create a proposal to be presented to your classmates 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 7 and go through a few drafts and stages: an informal project pitch to the class on March 12, a written proposal brought to class for peer editing on March 19, and a final draft submitted to the instructor on March 21. 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.

**Research Update and Progress reports (10% total).** Teams will meet with the instructor for 10-15 minutes in class on March 21 and March 28 in order to update the instructor on the project’s status, including the incorporation of research sources. Specific guidelines will be provided so that each team member may contribute to these progress reports equally.

**Team Project Document (30%).** This document must be collaboratively written; each team member is expected to produce between 350 and 500 words of the document. Working together, team members should ensure that the work is stylistically consistent and appropriate for the target audience. The team must also produce an abstract for the document. A draft of the document is due in class on April 4 for peer editing. The final draft is due on April 9. More details will be provided.

**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 (350-500 words), due April 9.

### **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

<b>Week 1</b>	Jan. 8/10: course introduction, academic integrity, types of writing done in the discipline, audience expectations, writing sample
<b>Week 2</b>	Jan. 15/17: writing mechanics (based on need): grammar and style (concise writing)
<b>Week 3</b>	Jan. 22/24: reading for salient details, composing abstracts and summaries, in-class summary assignment (5%)
<b>Week 4</b>	Jan. 29/31: writing for specialist audiences, features of technical writing, IMRaD/PPDAC organization, examination of “technical”/scientific articles, critical review of an article (5%, started in class and submitted to the D2L dropbox by Sunday, Feb. 3, 4:30 pm)
<b>Week 5</b>	Feb. 5/7: writing for “semi-specialist” audiences (executives, financial experts, policy-makers, politicians, etc.), strategies of persuasion, standards of practice, visual design of reports and white papers, memo assignment (scenario-based: explain the important features of a technical document and their repercussions; make a recommendation). This assignment, worth 5% will be begun in class and submitted to the D2L dropbox by Sunday, Feb. 10, 4:30 pm)
<b>Week 6</b>	Feb. 12/14: communicating to non-specialist audiences (general public), rhetorical features of popular writing, strategies for explaining difficult concepts, examination of examples of popular writing, blogs, and vlogs. The follow-up assignment (10%) will involve a choice: either a blog (profile of a classmate) or a vlog (simplifying a technical concept for a non-math audience). See the assignment description for more details.
<b>Week 7</b>	Feb. 26/28: working collaboratively, team project guidelines, research and analysis skills, selection of teams, brainstorming and proposal writing
<b>Week 8</b>	March 5/7: preliminary project work, 10-minute team consults with instructor regarding project plan (Thurs.)
<b>Week 9</b>	March 12/14: informal proposal pitch to class (Tuesday), workshop for written proposal (hard copy due March 19 for peer editing)
<b>Week 10</b>	March 19/21: peer editing of written proposals (Tuesday), team research check-in and progress update (5%, Thursday)
<b>Week 11</b>	March 26/28: free class time for project work, second progress report (5%, Thursday)
<b>Week 12</b>	April 2/4: reflecting on the term, start of reflection assignment, peer editing of project report (Thursday)