



Department of English, Winter 2020
English 378/MTHEL 300: Professional Communication in Statistics and Actuarial Science
Section 001: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:30-12:50 in SJ1 2011

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

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00-2:00 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 range of audiences from specialists 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; you will be offered a range of assignments from which to choose in order to best meet your own learning needs; you will work collaboratively with your classmates on some assignments.

Required Texts

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

Course Requirements and Assessment

Weekly participation and peer assessment	Throughout the term	15%
Assignment 1 (critical analysis)	Jan. 23 and 30	10%
Assignment 2 (non-specialist writing)	Feb. 4 and 11	10%
Assignment 3 (non-specialist presentation)	Feb 25/27	15%
Proposal (for assignment 4)	March 17 and 19	5%
Research meeting (regarding assignment 4)	March 24	5%
Assignment 4 (briefing memo)	March 31 and April 2	15%
Final test (take home)	April 2-3	20%
Writing Reflection	April 7	5%

Participation and Peer Assessment (15%). Earn your grade by being in class regularly (and on time), showing a willingness to make earnest and thoughtful contributions to group and class discussions, being prepared with completed work when expected, and providing sincere and constructive peer feedback. Chronic absences, lateness, disruptions, sleeping, game-playing, texting, working on math assignments, and

similar types of distracting/disengaged conduct will deflate the grade. You need to be both physically and mentally present in order to participate. The same goes for peer editing, which will be done in class.

Assignment 1: critical analysis (10%). You will be given a choice of assignments; these will normally involve reading for salient details, criticism, statistical analysis, critical comparison, and demonstrating statistical literacy – in other words, showing that you understand the requirements of “specialist” communication in your field. This assignment will be done in two drafts.

Assignment 2: non-specialist writing (10%). The audience for this assignment is the “general” public – clients, young people considering career paths, people who want understand some of the implications of what you do, anyone looking to be informed or inspired about what the future might bring. Options for this assignment will include short pieces for popular science publications, interviews, biographies, profiles or “spotlights” on particular individuals, informational pieces on the range of possibilities in the field (or interesting current work being done) or blog entries. This assignment will be done in two drafts.

Assignment 3: non-specialist collaborative presentation (15%). As with assignment 2, this project is designed with a non-specialist audience in mind. It will require collaboration with at least one other student, and will involve a 10-minute presentation to the class in which you demonstrate your ability to explain technical concepts in a way that the non-specialist can understand. In lieu of a presentation, you may create a 10-minute video to be shown to the class.

Assignment 4: semi-specialist audience (25%). 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, 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. You will also present your proposal idea to the class for feedback. Second, you will meet briefly with me to show examples of the current and authoritative research you have found (5%). Finally, you will produce a brief report (15%) 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 final assignment will be done in two drafts.

Take-home test (20%). Throughout the term, we will be discussing various concepts such as audience, context, usability, rhetoric, and integrity. The take home test will require you to demonstrate your understanding of these concepts by responding to various scenarios and/or coming up with specific examples from your experience. The test will be given out in the last class, and you will have 24 hours to complete and submit your answers to Learn.

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 will completing assignments and listening to class discussions (whether it validates your own experience or contradicts it).

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

Normally, project assignments that are submitted late without a valid excuse will be penalized 2% per weekday. Often students have legitimate reasons for requesting an extension or missed in-class assignment; in such a case, you should take the opportunity to compose a formal and polite e-mail to me, outlining the reasons for the request and providing a rationale for a new due date. This e-mail should be sent at least 24 hours in advance of the due date.

RULES FOR GROUP WORK IN ASSIGNMENTS

When working on a group assignment, a Group Assignment Checklist must be completed and submitted with the assignment: https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/sites/ca.arts/files/uploads/files/group_assignment_disclosure.pdf

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance in all classes is mandatory; each unwarranted absence will result in a mark deducted from the Participation grade. See the description under "Participation and Peer Assessment" above.

ELECTRONIC DEVICE POLICY

Devices (laptops, cellphones, smartphone, tablets, etc.) may only be used in ways that are conducive to learning in this course (for example, taking notes, examining documents on Learn, or looking for research articles). Be courteous in your use of devices; do not distract others in the class who may have different learning styles.

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 English 119 must be formally and professionally written.

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION [REQUIRED LANGUAGE APPROVED BY SJU SENATE COUNCIL]

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, 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/ 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, www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Discipline_20131122-SJUSCapproved.pdf](http://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Discipline_20131122-SJUSCapproved.pdf). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to University of Waterloo Policy 71, Student Discipline, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm. 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, www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Appeals_20131122-SJUSCapproved.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/.

Class Schedule:

Jan. 7	Course introduction	Jan. 9	Academic expectations, key terms, paraphrase, quotation, and referencing, quick personal profile
Jan. 14	Specialist (academic, scientific, technical) communication	Jan. 16	Workshop: practice, and start of assignment 1
Jan. 21	Organization, clarity, and document usability	Jan. 23	Workshop: peer editing of assignment 1
Jan. 28	Non-specialist (general public, clients) communication; strategies for explaining difficult concepts	Jan. 30	Workshop: practice, and start of assignment 2 Due date for assignment 1
Feb. 4	Workshop: peer editing of assignment 2	Feb. 6	Collaborative work
Feb. 11	Workshop: start of assignment 3, short meetings with instructor Due date for assignment 2	Feb. 13	Presentation skills
Feb. 25	Assignment 3 presentations	Feb. 27	Assignment 3 presentations
March 3	Semi-specialist (managers, policy makers etc.) communication	March 5	Summary skills, concise writing
March 10	Finding and making use of research sources start of assignment 4	March 12	Proposal writing, work on assignment 4
March 17	Proposal presentations	March 19	Proposal presentations (if necessary) and work period; due date for written proposal
March 24	Proposal adjustments, research consultations	March 26	Research consultations (if necessary), work period
March 31	Peer editing of assignment 4	April 2	Course conclusion and reflection, due date for assignment 4, take-home test assigned