



ST. JEROME'S
UNIVERSITY

St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo
Department of English
ENGL 378/MTHEL 300
Professional Communications in Statistics and Actuarial Science
Fall 2020

Instructor Information

Instructor: Jesse Hutchison

Office Hours: Th 1:00-2:00PM in Virtual Classroom

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Course Description

Clear and effective communication is a crucial component of any field, particularly in actuarial science. This course endeavours to provide you with the tools you will need in order to successfully deliver material to both experts and non-experts. This means improving on the basic fundamentals of writing. In the first part of the course, then, we will discuss various strategies to write in a way that is professional, critical, concise, and precise. You will 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 research, editing, and the necessity of strong public speaking skills.

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
- 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
Online Discussion		10%
Citation Assignment	September 14-September 20	5%
Grammar Assignment	Sept. 21 – September 27	5%
Summary/Criticism Assignment	October 3-October 9	10%
Video Presentation	October 19-October 25	15%
E-Mail Assignment	October 26-November 1	10%
Written Proposal	November 14-November 20	15%
Reflection Assignment	November 30-December 6	5%
Final Project	December 7-December 13	25%

Online Discussion (10%): A vital component of workplace or academic communication is interpersonal and it is advantageous to be able to communicate with your colleagues. Consequently, I have created a forum on LEARN with several topics for you to have on-topic discussions with your fellow classmates. To find the forum, click the Connect tab and then click on Discussions. You will be graded in terms of your contributions to these topics. You are asked to contribute to eight of the threads that will appear throughout the term. Feel free to write a paragraph or two where you address the issue in that week's thread. Keep in mind that your contributions to a thread will only be marked if you contribute to the discussion the week it has been made available. Apart from the first week, I will be putting up a new thread every Monday, so if you are contributing to that week's thread, you will want to respond by the Sunday evening before the next thread is due to go up. Just remember to be kind, courteous, respectful and friendly even if disagreeing. You will therefore be graded in terms of frequency of posts, level of insight (within reason for an online discussion), clarity, and the tone of your writing. I may hop into the discussion at times to build and guide discussions and clarify information. That being said, this is not the space to direct questions or comments to

me as I will be available for that over email and over our office hour chats.

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 between **September 14-September 20**.

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 between **September 21 – September 27**.

Summary/Criticism Assignment (10%): For this assignment, you will read a recent article from an academic journal that I have posted on LEARN and provide and directly copy and paste from the article its thesis statement (2 marks), two or three of its most central points (1.5 marks), and the essay's own argument about what it makes it unique or different from other analyses on the topic (1.5 marks). Remember that these are not to be in your own words but copied from the article. Then, in 400-500 of your own words, write a critical analysis of the article (5 marks). 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). Do the authors display any bias? Are the paper's abstract and its integration of visual supplements such as tables and graphs effective? 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. The summary/criticism will be submitted to the LEARN dropbox by 11:59pm between **October 3-October 9**.

Video Presentation (15%): 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. Videos should be uploaded to LEARN by 11:59pm (or a file with a link to the video should be submitted on LEARN) between **October 19-October**

25.

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. The response should also consider the rhetorical elements we discussed as well. You will be assessed on the strength and clarity of your critique and response as well as your techniques of persuasion. The assignment will be submitted to the LEARN dropbox by 11:59pm on **October 26-November 1**.

Written Proposal (15%): Roughly halfway through the term, I will place you into a group. As a group, you will submit a carefully written proposal for your final group project (see description below). For this proposal, you will answer three key questions: what will be done, how will it be done, and why should it be done? The proposal will also include a literature review, meaning you will need to have done research into three legitimate sources for this project. Overall, the proposal should be structured as follows: introduction, literature review, methodology, conclusion, and bibliography. As is the case with many proposals, a major goal should be to demonstrate to your reader that this is a project worth greenlighting, since the reader of proposals tends to be in a position to do so. In that case, you want to really try and sell your project here by demonstrating that you have an idea that is unique, that is worth doing, and that is using the best methods to deliver the goods. Moreover, this proposal is in many ways meant to be a helpful way to get you thinking about the final project – in other words, the information in it should be what you genuinely intend to do for the final project (do NOT, for example, make up methods that you will not be actually undertaking). However, because I will give you feedback to strengthen your final project, you are ultimately not bound to what you write in the proposal. Proposals should be between 1000-1200 words (not including the bibliography). Each group member should contribute roughly 200-250 words and take part in the editing process. I will assess the proposal in terms of its clarity, the strength of the idea, the persuasiveness of the pitch, and the appropriate use of each section. Proposals are due in the LEARN dropbox on **November 14-November 20**.

Reflection Assignment (5%): For this assignment, you are asked to honestly and critically evaluate your experiences in this class. Discuss something that you feel you improved on and what might be something you need to work on further. Consider as well whether the course has helped you beyond the confines of the class. Reflections should be between (300-400 words) and submitted to LEARN by 11:59 on **November 30-December 6**.

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. The final grade will consider the 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. 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 **December 7-December 13**.

Late Work

All assignments are to be handed in on LEARN within the submission window listed above. If you are handing the assignments in on the last day of the window, you will have until 11:59PM that day. 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. While the due dates are flexible this term, late papers though may still be subject to a late penalty of 2% per day.

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.

Office Hours: I will be holding my office hours in the Virtual Classroom on LEARN every week on Thursday from 1PM-2PM. The office hours are not mandatory and consequently do not contribute towards your mark. However, I do find that they are very helpful to clarify course information and it also allows for interaction that would normally take place in a classroom setting. The system that we use will allow for all the students in the class to attend though only seven webcams can be active. Despite this, there is also a chat available to post questions that will be available to everyone throughout the entire office hour. See here for further details on how to share/unshare your webcam:

<https://wiki.uwaterloo.ca/display/ISTKB/Bongo%3A+Privacy+during+live+event+particip+ants>

Email

I am always happy to respond to emails and usually respond quickly. 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. If you have not received a response after 24 hours, or 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, www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/upload_file/PLCY_AOM_Student-Petitions-and-Grievances_20151211-SJUSApproved.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-SJUSApproved.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, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm

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/

Course Outline/Class Schedule:

September 8: Introduction

September 11: Academic Integrity

Citation Assignment Due September 14-September 20

September 15: Grammar

September 18: Style

Grammar Assignment due September 21 – September 27

September 22: Audience, Voice/Concision

September 25: Reading: “Are the Dead Taking Over Facebook?”

September 29: Critical Thinking

Summary/Criticism Assignment due October 3-October 9

October 6: Readings: “Using narratives and storytelling to communicate science with non-specialist audiences,”

October 9: Oral Presentations

October 10-18: Reading Week

Video Presentation due October 19-October 25

October 20: Rhetoric

October 23: E-mails

Emails due October 26-November 1

October 27: Reports

October 30: White Papers

November 3: Written Proposals

November 6: Research Tips

Proposals due November 14-November 20

November 17: Integrating Quotations

November 24: Common Errors

November 27: Final Thoughts, Reflection Assignment

Reflection due November 30-December 6

Final Project due December 7-December 13