

## **WR323: Collaborative Writing for Industry**

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### **Contact:**

Email: [lewisj@mail.wou.edu](mailto:lewisj@mail.wou.edu)

Office Hours: M/W 12:00-2:00 PM or by appointment

Office: HSS 309

Phone: 423-653-4841

*When you write at work, you act. You exert your power to achieve a specific result, to change things from the way are they are now to the way you want them to be.*

Anderson, 10

*Professional and technical writers create the small documents that make the world run.*

B. L'Eplattenier

### **Course Description:**

Professional communication through the study of collaboration, audience, purpose, and ethics. Rhetorical problem-solving principles applied to diverse industry writing tasks and situations.

Students will engage in professional practices and learn to respond to challenges in a flexible manner. In this course, you'll work with a variety of professional genres that are frequently encountered in the workplace. When we finish, you'll be better able to:

- Analyze audiences and situations
- Write and manage projects collaboratively with peers
- Manage a sustained, multiple product project
- Design and produce texts and graphics
- Conduct basic usability testing
- Develop effective oral presentations

### **Texts and Materials:**

Anderson, Paul V. *Technical Communication: A Reader-Centered Approach*. 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. Wadsworth, 2013. ISBN: 113330981X (I am providing this text digitally but you're free to purchase it should you like)

Lego Brick Box. These are available via Amazon. You may substitute any other basic Lego box set that contains loose, multi-purpose pieces, but you may not use a kit (i.e. Lego

Castle, Lego X-Wing Fighter, Lego Speed Boat, etc.) Since you will be deploying the Legos with a partner, you may choose to split the cost with them.

## **Major Assignments:**

Almost everything we do this quarter will be part of three major projects. As in the workplace, these projects will not run consecutively. Rather, they will overlap, and the techniques, skills, and strategies gained from each will inform the others.

Following are brief overviews of the work sequence. Full descriptions will be available as each begins.

**The Onboarding Project** will introduce the fundamental principles that will be central to the rest of the course. Employing the framing concept of the “onboarding process” many companies or institutions use to orient new employees, the project will establish the course’s expectations of you as a worker (writer, editor, collaborator, . . .) and for the quality of your work. The project will result in a number of collaborative products and a portfolio of individual work that demonstrates understanding of and facility with the fundamentals of Professional and Technical Communication, rhetoric, workplace conventions, and genres.

**The Instructions Project** is designed to address three issues in modern professional writing.

- The first of these is that writing to teach, to instruct, to demonstrate, or to document procedures is a prevalent form of writing in which almost all professionals engage and yet is widely ignored as a skill to be learned and practiced.
- The second is the fact that much of the professional writing that you will do in the future will never see paper, will not be linear in design, and will require very different things of both readers and writers than traditional paper texts. The project will take up the design and navigation issues of non-paper, non-linear texts.
- The third is the fact that writing in the “real world” is often . . . nay, almost *always* collaborative.

**The Feasibility Study** will require that you work collaboratively with a team who will create a workplace, starting with a problem or need and working through designing, producing, advertising, etc. the product or approach you propose as a solution. This project will officially launch near mid-term and continue to the end of the quarter, but I suggest considering ideas, topics, possible teammates, and related issues now. This project involves multiple genres—most notably a substantial proposal and report—and consistent workflow management. More detail will be available later in the Assignments section of Moodle.

Here's how the point structure breaks down:

<b>Project</b>	<b>Available Points</b>
Onboarding Project	250
Instructions Project	250
Feasibility Study	500
<b>Total Available</b>	<b>1000</b>

An elaborated breakdown of points within each unit will accompany each unit assignment.

All three projects must be completed; failure to complete any one project will result in an F for the course.

### **Grades:**

Since this is a course in professional writing, your work will be graded as though you were submitting it to your immediate manager.

A A-	940-1000 900-939	A manager would be very impressed with your work and remember it when a promotion is discussed. In our course, this means your final product has excellent content, clean text, and excellent document design. Additionally, your work is thorough, coherent, well-supported, and organized in a useful fashion. It demonstrates a superior understanding of audience, purpose, and rationale.
B+ B B-	880-899 840-879 800-839	A manager would be satisfied, but not particularly impressed. This means that your product meets the basic standards of writing and overall production, as well as demonstrates a step forward in your learning process. It is sufficiently developed, organized, and supported, and you have demonstrated a solid understanding of audience, purpose, and rationale.
C+ C C-	780-799 740-779 700-739	A manager would be disappointed, and would require you to revise the document before a client sees it. Your work may have clear but undeveloped ideas, or it may not engage or affect the reader. It likely contains some errors in logic, mechanics, or grammar.
D	600-699	A manager would be troubled by the poor quality of your work and likely note it in your annual review. The level of writing skill forces the reader to work too hard to understand your ideas. The text may have incomplete information, lack clear organization and design, and have serious grammar or mechanical issues.
F	599 and below	A manager would start looking into replacing you. In this case, your work does not fit the assignment parameters, is so underdeveloped as to demonstrate incompetence, or is mechanically and grammatically incomprehensible. The most likely root cause is a pronounced lack of concern about audience perceptions of the writer as a professional.

### **Course Policies:**

**Initiative and Responsibility:** One of the most significant ways in which this course may differ from the other writing studios you've taken is the degree to which you will be expected to be responsible for and to initiate your own learning. For instance, when you

are preparing for a presentation, you are responsible for determining what means will work best and for letting me know if you need some assistance from me to make things work.

My responsibility is to respond to your inquiries and requests for assistance, to offer whatever help I can, and to suggest alternatives when I don't think I can offer substantial help; however, I will not be telling you what you should be doing. It is your job to determine what is appropriate and to ask questions when you don't know.

**Attendance and Participation:** You are expected to show up and participate in all class sessions, peer reviews, presentations, and out-of-class meetings. Writing studios are courses in language learning, and language is learned in communities; therefore, it is essential that you attend class and participate. Absences and lack of preparation for class will affect your classmates work as well as your own. The work you do in class, the work you do to prepare for each class, is as important as any polished assignment you turn in for a grade. In addition, each unit calendar is only a projection and may be subject to occasional changes and revisions as it seems appropriate, necessary, or just interesting. That is another reason why your attendance is vital. These policies also mirror the expectations of your future employer.

If you must miss a class, you are responsible for work assigned. Please realize, however, that class time cannot be reconstructed or made up, and that your performance, your work, and your final course grade will be affected by absences. *If you miss the equivalent of three weeks of classes or more without any official documented excuse it is unlikely you will pass the course.* I don't anticipate any of you will be in that position, however, so let's all agree to do the work, come to class, learn a lot, and make the course a meaningful experience.

**Late Work:** Deadlines are crucial in professional contexts, whether for a job application, a client proposal, or a grant progress report. They are similarly important in this course, where project planning and time management are part of the skill set you should be developing. Written assignments are due by the beginning of class or at the time specified for online submission. Major assignments (i.e. not blog posts or weekly assignments) are reduced by one letter grade per *business day*. All major assignments must be completed in order to pass the course. In-class work cannot be made up.

That said, nobody wants you to do well more than I do. If a documented emergency arises, please do not hesitate to let me know. The sooner you contact me, the sooner we can begin working together to make sure you remain on track in the class. University-sanctioned absences such as team travel should be cleared with me early in the quarter. I do not give extensions or incompletes except in instances of documented illness or the death of close relatives.

**Collaboration:** You will be working in groups throughout the course. This work will include drafting documents, organizing team roles, and preparing for class, as well as

collaborating on the production of actual texts. Relying on others and negotiating differences in working styles and tastes can be frustrating, but it is also part of the way work is done in the world. Therefore, you will be expected to conduct yourself as a professional, to complete jobs on time, and to contribute to the success of the team and the class.

I expect for you to be able to use your social skills to resolve your basic differences on your own. However, if you find a particular collaborative situation to be unreasonable or unresolvable, please notify me so that I can help you resolve it. If you find yourself considering taking this step, use this test: in a real job, would this be an issue worth taking to your boss and soliciting managerial intervention? If so, then it's time to let me know. If not, then find ways to work it out yourselves.

**Professionalism and Respect:** This course models the standards of professional conduct applicable in virtually any context. You are expected to behave professionally in your contributions to discussions, feedback given to your peers, interactions with the instructor, and, of course, in the work you do on class assignments. Respect works both ways. I do my best to be courteous and fair in all situations and at all costs. If you ever feel that you've been treated otherwise, come and talk to me about it.

**Technology:** Computers and networked applications are a part of writing culture, especially in the workplace, and any professional writing course must address current technologies. Obviously, we will be using computers as a means of communication as well as a means of production.

All texts produced must be cross platform compatible; despite what we may hear, the reality is that the working world is a mixed platform environment. You are responsible for knowing how to save files in formats that anyone can read. In most cases, saving text files in Microsoft Word format (.doc or .docx), for instance, is safe; I do not accept Microsoft Works, Word Perfect, Apple Pages, or Microsoft Publisher files. Specific guidelines will apply to each assignment, but you should assume that all submissions of work will happen in digital formats. Much of class business will be conducted via email. We will use your WOU email address; if you choose to use some other account, it is your responsibility to either (a) also check your WOU account or (b) take care of forwarding your WOU mail to that other account. You will be expected to check your e-mail daily and to respond promptly. *All email messages to me regarding this class should include "323" in the subject line; otherwise, I cannot guarantee that I will respond promptly. All attached files should bear names that indicate the writer and the assignment (e.g., smithproject1.doc).*

We may be doing some writing for the web; however, the degree to which this will become a significant feature of your work will depend on the choices you make in the nature of your projects and your level of experience and interest. None of the things we'll be working with require you to do any programming or have any special technical

knowledge, but they do require that you be prepared to push yourself and ask questions when you need to.

In addition to the computer use that I assign, you will be responsible, just as you would be in the workplace, for using the technology in whatever ways will make your work more efficient and appropriate for the audience.

**The Writing Center:** Experienced writing consultants at the Writing Center can teach you how to succeed on individual assignments and ultimately become a better writer. They're prepared to work one-on-one with you at any stage of your process and with any kind of writing you're attempting while attending WOU. Whether you need help understanding an assignment, brainstorming ideas, revising subsequent drafts, or developing editing strategies, face-to-face and online appointments are available for 25- or 50-minute sessions throughout the quarter and can be reserved up to seven days in advance via their online scheduling program. This is a free resource to all students and highly recommended for every assignment you work on in this class.

**Computer Use:** You are welcome to and encouraged to bring your laptops to class if they're being used for course purposes such as note taking, peer review, etc. Most of the work you do for this class will be handed in word processed. Use an easily readable font, size 12 point. Include one inch margins and follow the page layout used by the MLA format.

We will also be using email and Twitter for contact outside class. Use email or Twitter to contact me about your coursework, to set up an appointment to meet with me outside class, or to ask a question. Obviously, Twitter is a public platform, so send me a PM or email if you don't want the rest of class to know about our conversation.

Finally, we will be looking at a variety of sites on the Internet at times during the course. Please let me know if you have not had any experience using a browser such as Netscape or Explorer.

While computers save us great amounts of time over typewriters and make corrections much simpler, they are also susceptible to crashing and freezing. Save your work frequently, always make backup copies, and plan your projects with extra time allowed for those inevitable glitches.

### **Where to Find Help: The Writing Center**

Experienced writing consultants at the WOU Writing Center (APSC 301) can teach you how to succeed on individual assignments and ultimately help you become a better writer. They're prepared to work one-on-one with you on your writing at any time during your education at WOU. Whether you need help better understanding an assignment, brainstorming ideas, revising drafts, or developing editing strategies, face-

to-face and online appointments are available throughout the quarter and can be reserved in advance. For more information on hours, locations, and services, please visit: <http://www.wou.edu/las/humanities/writingctr/index.php> . This is a *free* resource to all students and I highly recommend it for every assignment you work on in this class.

### **Contacting Me**

If you are unable to meet with me during office hours, please see me before or after class or send me an email so that we can arrange an appointment. I expect you to accept a responsible role as a communicator in this class and to keep me informed about your work, your progress, your questions, and your problems. Please do not hesitate to meet with me to talk about your work several times during the quarter, preferably **BEFORE** your grade is the central concern. My office phone is 838-8325; additionally, my email address is [lewisj@mail.wou.edu](mailto:lewisj@mail.wou.edu) I will try to respond to your emails in a timely fashion. During the week (Monday-Friday) I will do my very best to respond within 24 hours of your initial email. On the weekends, I will respond within 48 hours.

I can be reached on Twitter for informal questions about class. My user handle is: [@justalewis](https://twitter.com/justalewis) . I'd love for Twitter to become a backchannel for course communication where all of the students in the course can quickly and easily ask questions and receive answers. To that end, we'll be using a course hashtag ([#wr323lewis](https://twitter.com/hashtag/wr323lewis)) to collate all course communications. I'll go over how to use Twitter and the hashtag during our course meeting. Bonus points will be provided to students who actively use Twitter to answer each other's questions about the course.

### **Disability Statement**

If you have a documented disability that requires academic accommodations at Western Oregon University, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Services (ODS), APSC 405, or at [503-838-8250](tel:503-838-8250), as early as possible in the term to discuss your disability-related needs. Use of ODS services, including testing accommodations, requires prior authorization by ODS and compliance with approved procedures. Students needing medical or mental health care can access the Student Health and Counseling Center by calling [503-838-8313](tel:503-838-8313), emailing at [health@wou.edu](mailto:health@wou.edu), or by walking in to schedule an appointment.

*Veterans and active duty military personnel with special circumstances are welcome and encouraged to communicate these, in advance when possible, to the instructor.*

### **Plagiarism**

Work you submit for this course must have been written by you for this course. You may not submit work in this course and in another (except with permission from me and the other instructor), and you may not submit under your name work written entirely or in part by someone else (unless you cite and document the source and mark quotations).

Patchwriting is copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym-substitutes. If you submit work that is patchwritten, you will have done poor writing and will get a commensurately poor grade. I do not, however, treat incidents of patchwriting as academic dishonesty unless I have some reason to believe that you intended to deceive your readers. It is difficult to write from sources without patchwriting, and the better you can summarize without patchwriting, the better you will understand what you are reading. For this reason, I teach writing from sources and summary techniques, and I welcome opportunities to work with students who want to acquire these skills<sup>1</sup>.

<b>WR323: Schedule of Events (subject to change)</b>		
<b>Week One (3/31-4/2)</b>	Policies and Procedures Rhetorical Terms & Concepts Rhetorical Analysis of Prospective Employers	pp. 4-8, "Characteristics of Workplace Writing" Ch. 3: Defining Your Communication's Goals <b>Brief Bio, Application Letter, Analysis, and optional resume due for review</b>
<b>Week Two (4/7-4/9)</b>	Expectations of You as a Writer & Employee Workplace Writing Conventions Intro to Superstructures and Other Genres Style/Tone	Ch. 10: Developing an Effective Professional Style Ch. 23: Letters/Memos <b>Review Onboarding Bio &amp; LoA.</b>
<b>Week Three (4/14-4/16)</b>	<b>Introduction to Instructions Assignment</b> Document Design Basics Collaboration and Teamwork Project Planning	Ch. 16: Designing Pages & Documents Ch. 19: Creating Communications with a Team <b>4/18 – Onboarding Portfolio due via email to lewisj@mail.wou.edu</b>
<b>Week Four (4/21-4/23)</b>	Designing Instructions Writing for the Web	Ch. 28: Writing Instructions Ch. 22: Creating Reader-Centered Websites
<b>Week Five (4/28-4/30)</b>	User-Centered Design Usability Testing	Ch. 4: Planning for Usefulness Ch. 18: Testing for Usefulness & Persuasiveness
<b>Week Six</b>	Working With Graphic	Ch. 14: Creating Graphics

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Rebecca Moore Howard for [this plagiarism policy](#).



(5/5-5/7)	Elements In-Class Usability Testing <b>Intro to Feasibility Study</b>	Ch. 15: Creating Eleven Types of Reader-Centered Graphics <b>Instructions Project due</b>
<b>Week Seven</b> (5/12-5/14)	Working with Multi-Level Docs In-Class Workshopping	Ch. 24: Proposals Ch. 8: Paragraphs, Sections, & Chapters
<b>Week Eight</b> (5/19-5/21)	Managing Client-Centered Projects In-Class Workshopping <b>No Class on Wednesday, 5/21</b>	Ch. 21: Managing Client & Service-Learning Projects Ch. 5: Planning Your Persuasive Strategies <b>Project Proposal Due – 5/23 by midnight.</b>
<b>Week Nine</b> (5/26-5/28)	<b>No Class on Monday 5/26 – RSA Conference</b> Conducting Workplace Research Organizing Your Findings	Ch. 6: Conducting Reader-Centered Research Ch. 9: Patterns for Organization
<b>Week Ten</b> (6/2-6/4)	Creating Effective Reports <b>No Class 6/4 – Computers &amp; Writing Conference</b>	Ch. 26: Feasibility Reports Ch. 13: Front & Back Matter
<b>Week Eleven</b> (6/9)	<b>FEASABILITY STUDY DUE</b>	<b>Feasibility Study Due</b>