

21W.732-2
Science Writing & New Media
Spring 2010
TR 12:30-2

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Office Hours: F 2-4
& by appointment

Explorations in Scientific and Technical Communication

This subject has been designated as communication intensive. Communication-intensive subjects require a minimum of 20 pages of revised writing divided among at least 4-5 assignments. CI subjects also offer students substantial opportunity for oral expression, through presentations, student-led discussion, or class participation. The maximum number of students per section in a Writing Program HASS CI subject is 18.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to help you master the principles and skills that will enable you to communicate about science and technology for various audiences and purposes. On one hand, the course will emphasize basic principles of good writing, which scientific and technical writing shares with other forms of writing. On the other hand, we will also focus on specific types of documents that are common in scientific and technical fields and organizations. While the emphasis will be on writing, you will also have the opportunity to explore scientific and technical communication through other types of media.

Texts

There are no required textbooks for this course. Required readings will consist of essays and articles that will be posted on the course Stellar site.

However, I do require that you own a handbook of English style and usage.

Writing Assignments

There are five writing assignments, which vary in length and complexity. Together, these assignments are designed to give you experience with a various kinds of scientific writing and a foundation for mastering the specific kinds of writing associated with your field and future profession. Assignments include:

- (1) a personal narrative essay (2-3 pages)
- (2) a research or service proposal (7-8 pages)
- (3) a peer review of a proposal (1-2 pages)
- (4) a researched science essay for the general public (9-10 pages)
- (5) a book review (4-5 pages)

All assignments *except* the peer review (#3) must be revised and resubmitted after you receive my comments on the first version.

Deadlines

Assignments must be handed in on time. Late assignments are always accepted, but there will be a penalty. All assignments must be completed in order to receive a passing grade in the course.

Reading Assignments

Coming to class prepared includes completing reading assignments on time. The readings provide important background for the topics we'll be discussing and for the assignments you'll be doing.

Oral Presentations

There will be one formal presentation and occasional short, informal presentations. In addition, you may be asked to lead a class discussion of an assigned reading.

Attendance

Attendance is essential in this course. Discussions of readings will provide ideas and background for your writing. Moreover, this class itself is in many ways a collaborative effort. In particular, your participation in the writing workshops is valuable both for you and for your fellow classmates.

It is a department policy that more than five absences will automatically result in a failing grade. More than two unexcused absences will affect your grade in this class. Extreme lateness to class (over 20 minutes) will be treated as an absence.

Conferences

I will meet with you individually at least once during the semester to discuss assignment topics and your progress in the class. However, I strongly encourage you to come and see me if you are having problems with an assignment or if you have questions or ideas about a piece of writing that you would like to discuss.

Grading

Grading will be based on the following distribution:

Written work: 70%: #1, 10%; #2, 15%; #3, 5%; #4, 25%; #5, 15%

Formal oral presentation: 15%

Class participation/informal presentations: 15%

I do not assign grades to the first version of assignments that will be revised. Instead, I will give you extensive comments and suggestions for revising the piece, and a mark of "+", "√", or "-". The revised version will be given a letter grade.

1 extension if ask before hand of 3 days

Plagiarism

Plagiarism: Using someone else's language and/or ideas without proper attribution is academically dishonest. As members of this class and the larger scholarly community you are expected to abide by the norms of academic honesty. While a good deal of collaboration is encouraged in and out of class, failing to acknowledge sources or willfully misrepresenting the work of others as your own will not be tolerated. Everything you submit must be your own work, written specifically for this class. Plagiarism can result in withdrawal from the course with a grade of F, suspension or expulsion from the Institute.

The booklet *Academic Integrity at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology: A Handbook for Students* explains these issues in detail, and you are responsible for understanding its contents. We will work on citing sources in class and discuss ways to acknowledge them properly. When in doubt, consult with me.

Another good source of information about plagiarism can be found at this website: <http://web.mit.edu/writing/citation/plagiarism.html>

Additional help with writing--

The **Writing and Communication Center (12-132)** offers *free* one-on-one **professional** advice from lecturers who are published writers about all types of academic, creative, and professional writing and about all aspects of oral presentations. Go to <http://humanistic.mit.edu/wcc> and click on "Appointments." The Center's core hours are Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.; evening and Sunday hours vary by semester—check the online scheduler for up-to-date hours.

1 appointment/week