Professional Report Writing

Course description & purpose

English 3365 prepares you for writing as a professional person. It focuses on proposals and reports, including recommendation reports, proposals, and oral reports. You will learn report uses, differences, purposes, conventions, and structures. You will also learn a number of different strategies for producing effective reports, including planning, analyzing audience and purpose, gathering data, revising, managing time, and conducting primary and secondary research. You will also develop strategies for effective document design and presenting visual information. Grammar and style will also be covered. You will have the opportunity to develop assignment topics that relate to your own major and interests.

Required texts

Purchase the required texts from the campus bookstore or another local bookseller:


Course websites

This document, the course schedule, class notes, and other materials are available online: [http://www.faculty.english.ttu.edu/zdenek/courses/3365/fall06/](http://www.faculty.english.ttu.edu/zdenek/courses/3365/fall06/). If changes need to be made to the course schedule, you will find an updated copy online.

A WebCT site has been created to facilitate the exchange of documents and discussion. To login with your eraider username and password, go to: [http://www.webct.ttu.edu](http://www.webct.ttu.edu). The WebCT site will be used most often during in-class activities when you are working in groups and need a quick and easy way to exchange drafts, notes, ideas, attachments, and to send in-class writing assignments to the instructor.

Grading

Your final course grade will be calculated according to the table below, using the standard curve of 90-100% = A; 80-89.9% = B; 70-79.9% = C; 60-69.9% = D; 0-59.9% = F. Under no circumstances will grades be rounded up or down.
Assignments

Full assignment directions and evaluation criteria are available in the course notes (which are posted on the course website). Here is a short summary of each assignment:

**Business email portfolio**

During the first few weeks of class, we will focus on writing effective and professional business email. Important business transactions regularly occur electronically (email, instant messaging, video conferencing, etc.). Understanding the rules of business email is crucial, especially when your audience (clients, co-workers, bosses) may only know you primarily through email. An important lesson of this unit is: Your identity is created through the email messages you write. Everyone writes and reads email, but not everyone understands the differences between writing email to a friend or relative, and writing email to a business colleague. The email clinic will address a number of key issues (etiquette, style, format, audience, privacy, clarity, brevity, formality, etc.) and pair each issue with an exercise. Your job will be to complete each exercise and, at the end of the clinic (see the course schedule for due dates), collect all of the completed exercises into a portfolio, which you will submit for a grade. The portfolio will be submitted with a cover memo in which you reflect on the assignment (see the course notes for full directions).

**Style & design analysis portfolio**

Using the information in *Revising Business Prose* and *Writing Proposals* (Chs. 9 & 10), analyze and revise a business proposal. The proposal you choose should be approved in advance by the instructor. This assignment is designed to introduce you to the proposal genre. It is also designed to focus on and review the basics: grammar, mechanics, syntax, and the plain style. Your portfolio will include 3 documents: 1) A written analysis of the approved proposal from the perspective of how well it adheres to the plain style and reflects good design choices (1000-1250 words); 2) A sentence and paragraph level revision of the most problematic sections of the proposal (at least 500 revised words), and 3) a cover memo in which you reflect on the assignment (see the course notes for full directions).

*Important note on plagiarism:* By asking you to revise someone else's writing, I am *not* telling you that it is okay to take someone's words and pass them off as your own. It is always wrong to put your name on a paper that you did not write. It is always wrong to fail to give credit (through proper citation) to another writer when you include his/her words or ideas in your writing. When you revise someone else’s proposal for this assignment, you are not putting your name on the proposal as the author, but engaging in an academic exercise designed to give you some practice applying the paramedic method in *Revising Business Prose.*

**Proposal**

Design and execute a formal proposal based on a hypothetical Request for Proposals described in the full assignment directions (see the course notes). Your proposal will be evaluated according to how well it satisfies the proposal criteria and models the proposal writing process described in
Writing Proposals. Your writing style will also be evaluated according to how well it reflects the model of good business writing described in *Revising Business Prose*.

**Recommendation report**
Write a recommendation report that aids the reader in solving a problem of your choosing. You will choose a feasibility study, a comparative analysis, or a cause-effect analysis. The recommendation report is similar in approach to the proposal report you will write, with the main difference that the recommendation report evaluates several solutions objectively and a proposal argues for one solution.

**Oral report**
Present one of your major assignments to the class. The oral report will be prepared as a PowerPoint presentation. The report will be in the range of 5-7 minutes.

**Daily work and reading quizzes**
Complete daily, in-class activities and exercises. In-class work will prepare you to complete the major assignments and to master major course concepts. The in-class work will also jump-start discussions. The reading quizzes can not be made up if you miss them. To be eligible to receive full credit on daily work, you should expect to use class time productively and to stay focused the entire period. You will also be assessed on your professionalism, willingness to contribute to class discussions, and collegiality (e.g. willingness to assist your classmates if necessary during in-class activities).

**Expected learning outcomes**
Upon completion of the course, students should be able to:

1. Effectively interpret the rhetorical situation as part of the process of writing proposals or other reports designed to manage change;
2. Design written arguments that are well-reasoned, logical, and rhetorically effective (i.e. persuasive and oriented to the values, beliefs, and needs of the audience);
3. Organize written reports logically and persuasively;
4. Adhere to context-specific stylistic standards;
5. Interpret and use standards of good document design to rhetorically deliver an effective report.

These five outcomes are inspired by the canons of classical rhetoric (especially invention, arrangement, style, and delivery). Moreover, they reflect the five main criteria for evaluating your writing assignments (see below).

**Methods for assessing the expected learning outcomes**
The expected learning outcomes of the course will be assessed through:

Four major writing assignments, each of which stresses different report genres and different skills; two of the major writing assignments focus heavily on style, grammar, and the plain style; one oral presentation; extensive coverage of the proposal genre (e.g. through lectures, notes, readings, discussion); reading quizzes; heavy emphasis on peer interaction, peer feedback, collaboration, and small group discussion.

**Criteria for evaluating writing assignments**
The criteria for evaluating your work in the course will vary based on type of assignment. In general, these criteria can be summarized along five dimensions (inspired by the canons of rhetoric):
1. **Context/situation:** The report shows awareness of purpose of document; shows awareness of audience’s needs and viewpoint; effectively describes the rhetorical situation; is attached to a problem-solving point of view; reflects how successful reports attempt to manage change.

2. **Content/invention:** The report reasons effectively, logically, and persuasively; draws on the resources of rhetoric (i.e. logos, pathos, ethos) to invent content that responds to the needs of the audience.

3. **Arrangement:** The report is organized logically and persuasively; partitions the content into major sections; divides each major section into three parts (intro, body, conclusion), adopts an appropriate organizational strategy (e.g. narrative, causal, or by effects).

4. **Style:** The report adheres to the standards of the plain style; strikes a balance between the plain style and the persuasive style; follows conventional standards of grammar and mechanics; uses a discipline-appropriate citation style.

5. **Delivery:** The report adheres to standards of good document design.

### Three tips for success

1. The two required books offer a formula for successful writing. Your writing assignments will be evaluated according to how well they are able to put the readings into practice. If you want to do well on the writing assignments, pay close attention to how those assignments are described in the readings.

2. The instructor’s course notes, which are linked from the course website, offer additional tips, techniques, and criteria for successful writing. Often, the instructor’s notes will identify which sections in the readings you need to pay special attention to. If you’re having trouble with a writing assignment, go to the instructor’s notes first for help. The notes may also identify additional resources (writing samples, tips, exercises) that you will want to check out while putting an assignment together.

3. The instructor is available and wants to meet with you during office hours or by appointment. He can also answer questions or offer writing and course advice over email or Yahoo messenger (send IM to seanzdenek during Yahoo office hours or to schedule an appointment). If you are having trouble with a writing assignment, please don’t wait to speak with the instructor.

### Course policies

- Be prepared for class by doing the assigned reading and writing in advance.
- Submit all required assignments to be eligible for a passing grade.
- Be on time for class.
- Expect to attend every class meeting. The success of the course depends upon your regular attendance. If you are absent more than three (3) times, your final course grade will be reduced 3% for each absence after three. Six or more absences will warrant a failing grade in the course. Because I offer every student three no-penalty absences, I do not excuse absences.
- Talk with me during the first two weeks of class to discuss your special needs or ADA accommodations, if any.
- Expect to participate actively in class discussions.
- Respect the views of others.
- Strive to reduce sources of distraction. For example, turn off or set to vibrate your cell phone prior to the start of class. Also, if you need to use the computers for activities that are not course-related (e.g. checking email), please do so before or after class only.
- Do not plagiarize. Your work must be your own. If you borrow words or ideas from another writer, you need to make it explicit (through proper citation) that the words/ideas in question are
not your own. If you use someone else’s paper as your own (e.g. a paper found on the Internet), you are in violation of the University’s policy on academic integrity. Please keep in mind that the penalty for plagiarism can be severe. See me immediately if you have questions about the University’s policy on plagiarism.

- Submit your work on time. Assignments should be submitted as WebCT email attachments to the instructor. Late work is penalized 10% per day. Assignments more than five days late will not be accepted.
- I do not offer extra credit assignments.
- Feel free to discuss course questions and concerns with me during office hours, by appointment, or via email (sean.zdenek@ttu.edu or WebCT email). I will do my best to respond to your email queries within 24 hours, except during weekends and holidays. I also have office hours on Yahoo IM (send IM to: seanzdenek).