

PA 501 — Business Writing for Public Administration

Stephen Orton, PhD
Adjunct Assistant Professor, HPAA
Program Manager, NC Institute for Public Health

(919) 966-8125 | 967-8360
stephen_orton@unc.edu
www.unc.edu/~sorton

Objectives

This course is designed to prepare you for the writing and communication requirements you will face in this program and in public administration. You will practice using communication tools you need to succeed:

- analytical skills
- audience awareness skills
- writing skills for planning and presenting ideas clearly
- persuasive skills

You will have lots of chances to analyze different business communication formats, from letters and memos to email, reports, policies, and press releases. This class will give you a unique chance to think about your writing and practice writing in a low-risk environment.

Expectations

1. I expect you to come to class, on time, and be ready to participate (in small group discussions, big class discussions, exercises and editing workshops, or whatever).
2. I expect you to share writing samples with me, and work to improve your writing skills based on our analysis.
3. Needless to say, I expect all the work you produce to (a) meet the criteria we establish as a class, (b) be submitted on time, and (c) be your own work.
4. I expect you ALL to pass this class.

Text

Maryanne Piotrowski's *Effective Business Writing*.

In addition, here are a couple of resources that will help you get through grad school. The parent of all style guides is Strunk & White, *The Elements of Style* (recently revised—get the new edition). Zinsser's *On Writing Well* is good too. You should own a writing handbook for grammar and punctuation questions. If you ever took freshman english, you already have one. And you should own a style guide as well. Some writing handbooks include parts of different style guides. The *Chicago Manual of Style* seems to be the dominant stylesheet in policy circles.

Groups

We will work in groups regularly. Most of you will be called upon to work in groups in the academic and working world, so this structure will help prepare you.

Group work in a composition class also provides you with a very tangible Other Person to communicate with as a reader/writer. You will be called upon to share your writing and to carefully read the work of others, provide feedback and editing. Most of the feedback you get in class will come from your peers.

Logistics

We meet on Monday nights at 6:00. You will be required to use the internet and email for this course, in between class sessions. I will hold virtual office hours: email or call me any time. If you need a chunk of time you might want to reserve that in advance.

Assessment Criteria

As noted above, you are required to pass this class. No one is permitted to fail this class. Together we will develop an objective set of criteria for assessing each assignment, so you will know how to succeed.

You have the option of continuing to work on an assignment after the due date in order to perfect it (until the end of the class that is). Your final grade is based on a “Portfolio Review” of the final perfected drafts.

Feedback that you get from me will be in the form of identification of strengths and suggestions for improvement—as opposed to justifications for grading decisions. If you make the improvements on the next draft, you’ll get an A.

Please bring two copies of each assignment to class unless otherwise indicated on the schedule.

Letters—15%

Memo—20%

Press Release—20%

Action Project—35%

Teamwork/Participation/Emails—10%

Appeals

Grade appeals must be made in writing.

If you don’t agree with the grade a paper received, write me a memo explaining why the grade given is in error. Be specific. Include a copy of the paper. You will need to reference the assessment criteria developed by the class for each assignment in making your argument.

WEEK **ACTIVITIES & DELIVERABLES**

Aug 23 Introductions; academic vs. professional writing; assessment criteria; task analysis

1 NEXT TIME: (1) Email me a writing sample—preferably a memo/letter/project from work, or an academic paper. I’ll give you feedback. (2) Learn about Plain Language on the internet; be ready to report. (3) Read Piotrowski Chaps 3, 4 and 7 (especially the letters section). (4) Draft complaint letter.

Aug 30 The Plain Language movement; memo tips; audience analysis; channels; information/persuasion; **Draft Complaint 2 due**; begin drafting responses

2 NEXT TIME: (1) Draft Assignment 3 Memo and bring copies to class to share. (2) Read the rest of Piotrowski (Chaps. 1, 2, 5, 6) (3) Find at least two internet sites that have useful examples of policy briefs. Print out *at least* one policy brief that exemplifies an important point about writing policy briefs. Bring copies to class and be prepared to discuss.

Sept 13 Skills test; Report tips; **Memo 3 and Complaint Response 2 due**

3 NEXT TIME: (1) For our email discussion, think about how you use email. How many messages do you get in an average week? How many messages are sitting in your inbox? At work, how often do you check your email? How does email make your job easier? How does it make your job more difficult? (2) Ask a manager or two that you know how *they* use email. (3) Draft your Assignment 4 Action Project and bring copies to class. One or two people will have the opportunity for feedback from the whole class—volunteers accepted.

Sept 20 Email; policies; responding, editing; press releases; **Action Project draft 4 due**

4 NEXT TIME: (1) Find one or two examples of *written policies* that exemplify writing principles we’ve discussed in class (on the web, in your files, whatever). Make copies so you can share them. (2) Find one or two examples of *press releases* (on the web, in your files, whatever). Be prepared to talk about them. (3) Carefully prepare a next-to-final draft. Bring one to share, one to hand in.

Sept 27 **Press release 5 due; Action Project Draft 4 due**

5 NEXT TIME: Prepare “dress rehearsal” final copy of your action project to submit; prepare Assignment 5 Press Release.

Oct 4 **Press Release 5 due; Final Project 4 due**; proofreading; wrap-up

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Writing Assignment 1: Complaint Letter

Write a “customer complaint” directed to a non-profit or government agency of your choice. (If you want, you can hand in a copy of an existing complaint letter that you wrote/received). The complaint letter should make a specific request of the agency. Due in class Week 2.

Writing Assignment 2: Customer Complaint Response

Draft a response to the customer complaint selected by your group. You’re writing as the addressee of the complaint letter. The goal of your response is to maintain a relationship with the writer—but the answer to their request is “no.”

We will begin drafting in class; revise, expand and bring copies to class for Week 3.

Writing Assignment 3: Memo

The purpose of this memo is to gather your (real or imaginary) “staff” together to generate specific ideas for your action project (Assignment 4). Give the staff all the information and direction they need in order for you to have a productive meeting. Due in class on Week 3.

Extra credit: Redesign your memo for email distribution and send it to our class listserv.

Writing Assignment 4: Action Project

Write a SHORT—no more than four pages—action recommendation on a topic of your choosing that relates to your work (or another class). The basic format is “In order to be more efficient/effective at _____, the organization should _____.”

Your action project should look like a typical policy brief. It should demonstrate the need for action, provide thoughtful analysis, and give good arguments to support the final recommendation.

Week 4: Be prepared to present a full draft in class. Week 5: Be prepared to swap next-to-final drafts with a partner from the class and give detailed feedback to each other. Week 6: Final versions due.

Writing Assignment 5: Press Release

Write a SHORT—no more than two pages—press release announcing a work- (school-) related news item. Your press release should look like a press release. Write for a lazy newspaper editor: that is, your writing should already look and feel like a newspaper article. Due in class on Week 5.