COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a course in Advanced Writing for Business. It is designed to help you produce clear, winsome writing in the context of any business or professional environment.

In this course, we will understand business writing as that kind of writing aimed at helping individuals achieve business-related goals. Because those readers to whom business writing may be directed are so varied—including potential employers, employees, subordinates, superiors, investors, regulators, potential clients, actual clients, customers, the general public, and so forth—and because the legal ramifications of most business writing are so far-reaching, two of the most important aspects of business writing are audience and ethics, and they will be given due emphasis in this class.

This class should improve your ability to understand and analyze complex ideas, to appreciate and develop the skill of effective argumentation, to write clear, grammatical, well-structured prose, and to do all of this with conscientious attention to pertinent ethical issues.

The prerequisite is WRIT 140 or its equivalent. No prior knowledge of business is expected or required in this course. However, it is assumed that students’ skills in grammar and reading are sufficient to enable them to read and write college-level prose. Students in need of remedial work in English grammar or reading comprehension are advised to drop this course and seek additional help before enrolling in 340.

This class largely consists of in-class discussions and exercises, individual writing assignments, tutorial sessions, and a group project. At a very basic level, the topics covered range from word-, sentence-, and paragraph-level issues of correctness, conciseness, coherence, and clarity to more global considerations of argumentation, organization and ethics.
COURSE GOALS

So far, so good. But this course is not housed in a vocational school, but in a major liberal arts university. How does this course relate to the larger goals of the University?

Let me answer by way of reference to the University’s statement of the Role and Mission of USC. The second paragraph of that document reads as follows:

Our first priority as faculty and staff is the education of our students, from freshmen to postdoctorals, through a broad array of academic, professional, extracurricular and athletic programs of the first rank. The (1) integration of liberal and professional learning is one of USC’s special strengths. We strive constantly for excellence in (2) teaching knowledge and skills to our students, while at the same time (3) helping them to acquire wisdom and insight, (4) love of truth and beauty, (5) moral discernment, (6) understanding of self, and (7) respect and appreciation for others. [bold print and numbering added]

I believe that no course in the undergraduate curriculum at USC provides better opportunity to realize this ambitious educational agenda than Advanced Writing for Business. Each phrase highlighted above is briefly discussed below:

1. Integration of Liberal and Professional Learning - In this course, we are liberal in that our writing is deeply informed by the rich classical tradition of the liberal arts of Grammar, Rhetoric, and Logic; but we are professional in that we are concerned with writing in a business environment, and so we draw important lessons from the professional, as well as the classical, world. The final writing products that are created in this class therefore represent a significant integration of both liberal and professional learning.

2. Knowledge and Skills - To write well, and to be able to improve one’s writing, one must have significant knowledge of at least two distinct areas: first, some aspect of the “real world”; and second, something of the theory that underlies writing effectively in various contexts, for various audiences. But additionally, one needs practice, drilling, repetition, and firm but gentle correction in the skill of writing. These three elements of improved writing are addressed in this course through (1) a deep reading of some book or set of articles that addresses a real world problem with implications for business on multiple levels, with additional research into related areas; (2) constant, substantive instruction in the theory of writing, with primary emphasis on lessons to be learned from the disciplines of Grammar, Rhetoric, and Logic; and (3) several papers and other small assignments, in which students can practice their writing skills, and on which they will receive substantive written and/or oral feedback from a writing professional who has considerable experience in both theory and in the “real world” of business and professional writing.

3. Acquisition of Wisdom and Insight - Business, the professions, and the political enterprise can be said to constitute a single world, a world in which the potential rewards of money, status, and power are vast beyond imagining. But those who attain these dizzyingly great heights often enough spiral to catastrophic ends, ruining not only their own lives, but the lives, reputations, and financial well-being of their families, friends, acquaintances, and employees. Moreover, sometimes in their fall, they can bring to their knees even centuries-old institutions, global corporations, pension funds, entire industries, and, on occasion—and this is a thing to be wondered at!—once proud, sovereign nations. A casual acquaintance with the events in the global economy, and in the world of finance, in just the past five years will easily bear out this observation. Therefore, in this course, we will strive always to keep in mind the lessons parading before us each day in the news, and to draw, so far as we are able, on the manifold wisdom traditions to which we individually still have recourse, whether of religion, philosophy, or culture, in order to illumine, as best as we can, the paths before us.

4. Cultivation of love of truth and beauty – Though often scorned and mocked in our day, the love of Truth and Beauty—along with their third sibling, the Good—represents the highest aspiration of the human spirit, and is to be honored and cultivated insofar as it lies within our power. The world of business presents a fine test case for the degree to which these high aspirations can be pursued in a world where goods and services are created,
bought, and sold, from motives that are often brutal and ruthless. Is it possible to cultivate the love of the True, the Beautiful, and the Good in the rough-and-tumble world of business? This course is conducted on the premise that if goods are truly “goods” and services are truly “services,” to ardently pursue the True, the Beautiful, and the Good in our economic lives will enrich us and our society immeasurably, and to fail to pursue them is to will our own destruction. Moreover, writing that fails to take into account the legitimate human desire for “truth beautifully dressed,” as the highest Rhetoric used to be described, will consistently fall short of complete success.

5. **Moral discernment** – Moral discernment is the act of bringing to bear one’s love for the Good on the tasks and challenges of the present moment. Because our economic lives, as well as the various social worlds we inhabit, are not infrequently marked by ambiguity, ignorance, conflict, and deception (not to mention active hostility to the Good that we perceive) putting into effect our own highest vision of the Good can seem so impossible to achieve that we can lose heart, and lose our will to aspire to it. In this course, then, through at least one written assignment and through class discussion, this course will invite students to consider seriously some of the challenges that they may face in their economic lives, as well as some of the resources that may help them in their own attempts to bring their love for the Good into play when facing these challenges.

6. **Understanding of self** – Socrates famously said that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” While a course in business writing may not seem to offer much opportunity for self-examination, it is a goal of this course to provide students with multiple opportunities to reflect on the shape and direction of their lives, using the world of business as a kind of refracting mirror. What kinds of obligations do we have to others—to our fellow students, to our fellow citizens, to those who have far less by way of financial or educational resources than we have? In our economic lives, do we have responsibilities for the environment? For our employees? To our employers? To our customers or clients? If and when we are confronted by fraud, conflict of interest, deception, exploitation, how will we respond? Are we concerned to live lives of integrity? What role will money play in our lives? These and similar questions will provide a kind of subtext for the course, a constant background for all of our class discussion and writing.

7. **Respect and appreciation for others** – With this last set of course goals, we come full circle back to the beginning point, which may now seem somewhat lost, and that is this: First and foremost, this is a course about **writing**. And the fundamental conviction undergirding this course is that all good writing, including all good business writing, is deeply, primarily, foundationally grounded in respect and appreciation for others. That is to say, that we are resolved to take into account as best as we can the legitimate needs, expectations, and limitations of our readers must be the attitude that undergirds everything we write. So while writing is on one level a kind of technical skill, like playing the piano, it is not merely a technical skill, in that all that we write is sure to be marked by failure if we do not take into account the readers for whom it is intended. When business writing is not grounded in respect and appreciation for the readers, it will invariably fail—to be clear, to be courteous, to win assent. It may indeed have quite the opposite effect—it may confuse, alienate, set fires. Therefore, in both our writing and in our speech, every care will be taken in order to foster in every student a deep respect and appreciation for others.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

How do these rather abstract goals translate into measurable learning objectives?

The ultimate aim of this course to help you produce clear, conscientious, cogent writing in the context of the business world. Accordingly, after successful completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Understand the distinctions between grammar, rhetoric, and logic, as well as the areas in which they overlap;
- Recognize and practice the style of “Plain English” that is associated with effective business writing;
- Create rhetorically compelling texts while staying within the confines of the “Plain English” style;
- Read texts thoroughly and fairly, and prove it by summarizing them efficiently in writing;
- Effectively evaluate the rhetorical strengths and weaknesses of various rhetorical artifacts, but especially writing;
- Support your own written claims with rhetorical force;
• Recognize salient differences in different rhetorical situations, and alter your writing accordingly;
• Recognize and evaluate the potential risks and rewards of various rhetorical forms and strategies, and so make effective choices about the style and form your written communication should take;
• Collaborate productively with others in creating a piece of multi-media based piece of communication that is rhetorically forceful;
• Express your ideas and conduct yourself in a professional manner.

TEXTS

REQUIRED:
Gerald Graff & Cathy Birkenstein, They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing (2nd ed.)
Joseph M. Williams and Gregory Colomb, Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace (10th ed.)

RECOMMENDED:

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING
Your final grade in this course will be based on the following:

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<th>Percent of</th>
<th>Points</th>
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Individual Writing Assignments — 75 Percent of Course

- Solving a Business-Related Problem 10 100
- Thinking Critically about Business 10 100
- Business Ethics 10 100
- Portfolio 25 250
  (A reworking of two individual assignments for your portfolio.)
- First drafts (3 total) 7.5 75
- 1-page papers or written exercises (5 total) 12.5 125

Team Project — 25 Percent of Course
A collaboratively-based project using multi-media to dramatize the human impact of a real-world business problem.

Total1 100% 1,000

PREREQUISITES: WRIT 140 or its equivalent.

1 Note: I reserve the right to revise any student’s grade upward from the grade earned through this point system based on my evaluation of the student’s final portfolio. Also, any assignment may be deleted at my discretion; and the total number of course points, and the corresponding percentages of the rest of the course assignments, would in that case be adjusted accordingly. Finally, though there is no grade per se for participation, note attendance policy below.
EVALUATION OF YOUR WORK
My goal in every class is to provide every student with the highest grade for the course that I can justify as a professional. It is also my goal that 100% of my students agree that their final grades are a fair representation of the quality of their best work in the class. It disappoints me if I am unable to accomplish my second goal; but I can pledge to all of my students that I will always accomplish the first.

I will do my best to make my expectations for the various assignments clear and to evaluate them as fairly and objectively as I can. If, however, you feel that an error has occurred in the grading of any assignment, please let me know as soon as possible so that I can re-evaluate your work if necessary. As best as you can, please explain to me fully and carefully what you think the problem is, and why you think the assignment should be re-graded. If you are at all persuasive, I will re-read the assignment. Do be aware, however, that while your grade may go up or remain unchanged, it is also possible that I will see significant problems that I missed initially, and assign a lower grade upon carefully re-reading your work.

GRADING CRITERIA
The evaluation and grading criteria used in this course are designed to faithfully reflect the University-wide expectations for WRI 340. [See Sample Grading Rubric at the end of this syllabus.] Accordingly, graded written assignments will be evaluated with respect to the following criteria (but note that these are categorized somewhat differently in my rubric):

Cogency (rhetoric & logic): The rhetorical power, or persuasiveness, of the paper, both overall and in its particular assertions.

Support (rhetoric & logic): The extent to which the paper’s assertions are supported with examples, evidence, or reasoning which are appropriate to the topic and audience.

Control (rhetoric): The organizational quality of the paper, including the following: effective use of titles, headings, bullets, fonts, bold print, and other typographical devices; appropriate and effective introductions and previews; well-defined and well-developed body structure; effective, appropriate, and balanced conclusions; appropriate transitions between sentences and paragraphs; effective use of organizational devices in sentences and paragraphs.

Topicality (rhetoric): The degree and extent to which the paper explores the issue(s) and conforms to the explicit guidelines set forth in the assignment, addressing all aspects of the writing task.

Style (rhetoric): The appropriateness of the paper’s sentence structure, word choice, fluency, and tone in terms of its purpose and intended audience.

Grammar and Mechanics (grammar): The quality of the paper at the surface level: syntax, grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

PROFESSIONALISM: POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
This class is intended to imitate a business environment in some important particulars, one of which is professionalism—in conduct, communication, and quality of work. Therefore, students are expected to attend class on time, turn in assignments on time, and cheerfully, thoughtfully, and constructively contribute to all in-class activities. All forms of unprofessional conduct, and especially behavior that is disrespectful of other persons, including me, will negatively affect a student’s chances of success in the class. Unprofessional conduct includes, but is not limited to, absences, tardies, late assignments, plagiarism, leaving early, sleeping in class, reading the newspaper or textbooks for other classes during class time, talking on a cell phone, checking e-mail, text-messaging, and speaking at inappropriate times or making inappropriate remarks. The consequences of these misbehaviors range from verbal reprimands to lowered grades. Students who persist in inappropriate behaviors will be invited to leave the classroom and may even be asked to withdraw from the course. In severe cases, such as plagiarism, offenses can result in failure for a paper, failure for the course, or even expulsion from the University. Also note: electronic devices, such as phones, laptops, etc., are increasingly problematic in
professional settings. At the request of the instructor, any such electronic device should be turned off immediately.

**Attendance and punctuality.** An expected mode of professional business behavior is punctual attendance at all meetings. Punctual attendance, and good participation, is a form of communicating professionalism, courtesy to others, and respect for the task at hand. Therefore, full, complete participation in the activities for each class session is expected. I will call the roll at the beginning of each class. Students may miss up to two (2) class sessions, and be late up to two (2) times without penalty. “Absent” means that you did not answer when I called your name at the beginning of class. Should you arrive after I have finished calling the roll, if you wish to be counted as merely “late” rather than “absent,” it will be your responsibility to notify me after class so that I can change it in the gradebook. If you do not notify me, expect to be counted as “absent” for the day. Under no circumstances may you interrupt regular class activities to notify me of your presence in class. Each absence after two will result in a 25-point deduction from the total score in the course; each late after two will result in a 10-point deduction. Note that multiple absences and/or lates can cause your class grade to be reduced by an unlimited amount. But also note: I can waive any penalties at my own discretion, so please let me know when you have extenuating circumstances.

**One-on-one conferences.** I hope to meet with each of you at least twice during the semester to discuss your writing and progress in the class. Some class time will be used for these meetings; however, it may also be necessary to schedule meetings with me outside of regularly scheduled class time.

**Assignments.** A hard copy of each major writing assignment is due on the date assigned. *Any assignment turned in later than that will receive a ten-point penalty for each class period that it is late.* After two weeks, the grade on any late assignment reverts to 0. Assigned responses to readings are due at the beginning of class each day. Since these responses are designed to prepare you for class discussion, they cannot be made up.

NOTE: An important part of this course is a series of writing workshops, in which students critique each others’ drafts of major assignments. *Students must typically bring five (5) completed (not rough) drafts of the assignment to each workshop session. Rough drafts will not receive full credit; if they are really rough, they will receive no credit.*

**Other requirements.**
- Word-processing software (a relatively recent version of Microsoft Word is standard)
- Access to a laser printer or equivalent

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**THE USC WRITING CENTER**

The USC Writing Center, located on the third floor of Taper Hall, is an excellent resource for students who want to improve their writing. You may schedule 30-minute appointments with writing consultants trained to assist you in planning, organizing, correcting, and revising your assignments. Some consultants are graduate business students in the Marshall School of Business. Others have special skills in working with students for whom English is a second language.

The WC also offers a nine-week series of Writing Modules designed to help non-native speakers develop the skills they need to succeed in WRIT 340. In addition, there are daily workshops on troublesome language and grammar issues, open to all students.

**SOME OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**

**Students with Disabilities**
Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. You can obtain a letter of verification for approved accommodations
from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 AM – 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged and inappropriate use of the ideas or wording of another individual . . . [It] is considered a grave violation of academic integrity and the sanctions against it are correspondingly severe (sanctions recommended by the university range from a grade of F in the course to suspension from the university). Most simply, plagiarism can be characterized as ‘academic theft.’

As expressed in the University Student Conduct Code (published in the current SCampus), behavior violating university standards includes:

11.11
A. The submission of material authored by another person but represented as the student’s own work, whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near-verbatim form.
B. The submission of material subjected to editorial revision by another person that results in substantive changes in content or major alteration of writing style.
C. Improper acknowledgment of sources in essays or papers.

Note: Culpability is not diminished when plagiarism occurs in drafts which are not the final version. Also, if any material is prepared or submitted by another person on the student’s behalf, the student is expected to proofread the results and is responsible for all particulars of the final draft.

11.12
A. Acquisition of term papers or other assignments from any source and the subsequent presentation of those materials as the student’s own work, or providing term papers or assignments that another student submits as his/her own work.

Because violations of this order threaten the heart of the enterprise of higher education, the sanctions for this kind of behavior are severe. Those tempted by these kinds of violations should read carefully the pertinent sections of the SCampus Student Guidebook, quoted at length here:

All academic integrity violations will result in an academic consequence. Failure to comply with the terms of any imposed sanctions may be considered an additional violation.

When a student’s enrollment is cancelled as a result of disciplinary action resulting in marks of “W” on the student’s academic transcript, the university’s policy is not to refund tuition or fees for the cancelled enrollment.

One or more of the following sanctions may be imposed for violations of university regulations.

11.81 *Expulsion from the University:* Permanent termination of student status. A permanent notation will appear on the student’s transcript. The student will be excluded from all classes, seminars and programs; will not be allowed to participate in any university-sponsored activity; may not receive a USC degree; and is barred from university premises. If the expulsion becomes effective during a semester for which the student currently is enrolled, the student’s enrollment will be cancelled by the university resulting in marks of “W” for the enrolled courses on the student’s academic transcript.

11.82 *Suspension from the University:* Termination of student status for a specified but limited period of time. During the period of suspension, the student will be excluded from all classes, seminars and programs; will not be allowed to participate in any university-sponsored activities; and is barred from university premises. A restriction
will be placed prohibiting the student from performing any registration transactions during the period of suspension. The restriction will not be removed, and the student will not be allowed to perform registration transactions, until the stated period of suspension has expired and all disciplinary obligations have been met. A notation will appear on the student’s academic transcript indicating the dates of suspension. Upon earning a degree from the university, the suspension notation may be omitted from the transcript at the sole discretion of the university. In some cases, suspensions may be permanently noted on the transcript. During the period of suspension, the student may not complete academic work elsewhere that may be counted toward the completion of a USC degree.

Violation of the conditions of suspension, university policies or regulations during the period of suspension may be cause for further disciplinary action, usually in the form of expulsion from the university. Normally after the suspension, the student will be on disciplinary probation for a specified period of time. If the suspension becomes effective during a semester for which the student currently is enrolled, the student’s enrollment will be cancelled by the university resulting in marks of “W” for the enrolled courses on the student’s transcript.

11.84

**Revocation of Admission:** The student loses admitted status to the university. The student may not continue enrollment or enroll for future semesters and may not receive a USC degree. Normally, revocation of admission precludes the student from the opportunity to apply to or be admitted to any program at the university in the future. A permanent notation will be made on the student’s transcript indicating that admission was revoked and the date of the action. If the revocation of admission becomes effective during a semester for which the student currently is enrolled, the student’s enrollment will be cancelled by the university resulting in marks of “W” for the enrolled courses on the student’s academic transcript.

11.85

**Revocation of Degree:** The student loses the right to claim the degree as earned. Posting of the degree will be removed from the student’s transcript, and a permanent notation will be made on the transcript indicating the revocation, the degree involved and the date of the action.

11.86

**Dismissal from an Academic Unit:** Permanent termination of the student’s right to enroll or participate in the classes, seminars and/or programs of a specific academic unit, school or department.

**Assistance with Papers**

In this course we encourage peer review, since it’s almost always helpful to have “another set of eyes” take a look at your paper and offer comments and suggestions. But where exactly is the boundary between helpful advice and illegitimate collaboration? Where should you draw the line? The following guidelines from the Writing Program answer this question explicitly:

The Writing Program encourages collaboration with your instructor, with Writing Center consultants, and with your classmates; such interactions constitute one of the most important and effective means by which writing is taught. In undertaking collaborative interactions, however, remember that you are finally responsible for guaranteeing that the resulting text represents your abilities and authority and not those of the persons assisting you, however well-meaning they may be. A simple guideline may help: *Never allow someone else to construct a section of your text longer than one or two sentences that you would not be able to produce on your own, and never allow anyone to copy-edit more than the first page of your paper.*

From *Writing 140 Course Book*, P. 6
COURSE OUTLINE  (brief version – detailed version to follow)

Weeks 1-5 - Theory and Philosophy of Business Writing: Rhetoric and Business Writing
   Reading: Mike Daisey, This American Life radio broadcast, 1/6/2012 (listen to 1-hour broadcast)
            They Say/I Say (as assigned)
   Writing: One 5-10 pg. paper on a problem relating to business, a preliminary draft, and several small papers

Weeks 6-10 – Some Pragmatic Considerations: The Writing Style that is “Plain English”
   Reading: Williams, Chapters 3-7
            Articles as assigned
   Writing: One 5-10 pg. paper relating to business and two small writing exercises
            Team Project: Dramatizing the Human Impact of a Business-Related Problem

Weeks 11-14 – Some Ethical Considerations
   Reading: Milton Friedman, “The Social Responsibility of Business is to Make a Profit”
            articles and websites as assigned
   Writing: One 5-10 page paper relating to business ethics

Week 15 - Final Portfolios Due

A Word to the Wise I: You should always be able to produce, given a few days’ notice, all materials related to the production of this and every paper you write, in this or any other class. This includes all of your research, all of your notes, and especially every single draft of your paper. That way, should any doubts ever arise as to the integrity of the writing process, whether regarding authorship or research, you will easily be able to put them to rest. When doubts about authorial integrity do arise, as unfortunately happens with some frequency in required college writing classes, inability to produce such thorough documentation of the writing process can leave a student, as the saying goes, “without a leg to stand on.” So take care.

A Word to the Wise II: A hard copy of your paper is due at the end of class on the day it is due. Bear in mind that e-mailed copies of your paper don’t meet this requirement. Also, because laptops get stolen, hard drives often fail to work properly, and printers often don’t print, your chances of getting the paper in by the date and time that it is due may be significantly enhanced by taking such precautionary measures as having multiple copies and printing out your paper in advance. If getting the paper in on time is important to you, I simply encourage you to take whatever steps you need to take in order to guarantee to your own satisfaction that it will in fact happen, and not merely come close to happening.