

Business and Professional Writing

Organizational Rhetoric and Writing

ENGL 400-04 | Fall 2011

Professor: Dr. Nathaniel A. Rivers

Email: nrivers1@slu.edu

Office: 222 Adorjan Hall

Office Hours: TTh 11:00-12:00p.m.

Course Site: <http://org rhet.wordpress.com/>

Student emails are typically answered within 24 hours (excluding weekends and holidays).

CONFERENCES AND CONTACT

I am open to discussing matters pertaining to course policies, readings, writing assignments, teamwork, and grades. Please feel free to contact me via email as well as in person. I hope you will also take advantage of my office hours.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Technical Communication Today, 4th Edition.

Richard Johnson-Sheehan

Team Writing: A Guide to Working in Groups

Joanna Wolfe

COURSE INTRODUCTION

Communicating with and within organizations is a crucial component of professional life no matter what shape that life takes or what directions that life moves in. Organizational rhetoric and writing can be defined as communication that *motivates and structures values and behaviors within an organizational setting*.

Organizational Rhetoric and Writing introduces students to the field of professional communication through a sustained engagement with its practices and principles. Students produce a variety of documents (across genres and media) in terms of and in the context of key theoretical understandings of that work, namely: rhetorical theory, ethics, and document design. As future professional communicators, students will continually be required to analyze (that is, theorize) audiences, activities, organizations, and contexts. Importantly, for students with a range of professional and personal aspirations, this course defines “organizations” broadly, including but not limited to: non-profits, NGOs, businesses, advocacy groups, political action committees, philanthropic organizations, and institutions of higher learning.

Generally speaking, we spend the semester considering the question of *how do we go about creating, maintaining, sustaining, growing, and reshaping organizations*. How do we design (as in a blueprint) and then build an organization?



COURSE VALUES

This course and its definition of professional communication are grounded in rhetoric, which students will hopefully come to value as a productive method for negotiating, constructing, maintaining, and reshaping their professional lives. **Rhetoric**, briefly defined, is the use of symbols to produce an effect (e.g., a verbal command to “Stop,” a red traffic light, a Journey song imploring us “Don’t Stop Believing,” or a floor plan that privileges collaboration over isolation). Though rhetoric has become a negative word within political circles and contemporary media, it has a rich history as one of the oldest intellectual pursuits in the western world. With a focus on audience, context, and *the persuasion inherent to all human endeavors*, rhetoric greatly informs the purpose of this course.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Throughout the semester, students engage readings and one another, complete a variety of in-class exercises, and produce a range of documents in exploring the work of organizational rhetoric and writing. In order to foreground organizations, a central component of the course is *group work*. Students pitch, select, and organize *actual* organizations that they work on during the course of the semester. Working with these organizations throughout the semester (this is but one instance of how the structure of the course enacts the content of the course), students work to achieve concrete goals through deliberate rhetorical action. That is, *students in this course are not assigned documents to compose; they define the goals they will accomplish*. This means that students negotiate with one another to determine the shape of their work for the course. While student teams necessarily produce different document sets, all work in the course stresses the importance of primary research, document design, effective writing, and audience awareness—aspects that will shape their professional lives.

COURSE STRUCTURE AND APPROACH

This course is layered: the principles of organizational rhetoric and writing are layered within the practice of organizational rhetoric and writing.



For instance, as students form teams they will be reading about the dynamics of teamwork and researching the tools and technologies that facilitate it. Each week (following the formation of teams) is devoted to a principle of rhetoric and writing that informs the practice of it. Structurally, the class continually reinforces itself. This course's approach to professional writing and rhetoric could be described as habitual. It is driven not by a set of memorize-able facts or data, but by the development of habits. To develop these habits everything done in this course is treated as professional. There is, then, no busy work—only the work of the course. Every aspect of the class—from communicating with teammates and the instructor in person and via email to submitting assignments—is part and parcel of the course. Emails to the instructor and to teammates, the appearance of deliverables, and the quality of online discussions will be professional. “Professional” does not mean rigid and oppressive perfection; it means an awareness of your rhetorical situation and an attention to detail. Emails to the instructor are different from emails to teammates and to external contacts. “Professional quality” is relative to the situation, the audience, and purpose. All such communications matter: they communicate much about their author.

This class hopes to, finally, cultivate a set of habits vital to successful professional communication. The best way to good habits is lots of practice. The course, then, at times, has a heavy workload. This workload, however, is calculated to create the experience of professional communication: projects overlap, deadlines loom, and expectations are often high (as are the stakes). Developing the work and writing habits necessary to successfully complete assignments on time is itself a desired outcome of this course.

Assignment	Point Value
Organization Idea Pitch	5
Application Project	15
Organization Plan	15
Project Midterm Report	10
Project Postmortem	20
Individual Documentation Project	20
Organization Outcomes	15
Total	100

COURSE GOALS

Writing in Context

Analyze cultures, social contexts, and audiences to determine how they shape the various purposes and forms of writing, such as persuasion, organizational communication, and public discourse, with an emphasis on:

- writing for a range of defined audiences and stakeholders
- negotiating the ethical dimensions of rhetorical action

Project Management

- understanding, developing and deploying various strategies for planning, researching, drafting, revising, and editing documents both individually and collaboratively
- selecting and using appropriate styles that effectively and ethically address contexts and audiences
- building *ethos* through voice, evidence, documentation and accountability

Document Design

Make rhetorical design decisions about documents, including:

- understanding and adapting to genre conventions and audience expectations
- understanding and implementing design principles of format and layout
- interpreting and arguing with design
- drafting, researching, testing, and revising visual designs and information architecture

Teamwork

Learn and apply strategies for successful teamwork and collaboration, such as:

- working online with colleagues
- determining roles and responsibilities
- managing team conflicts constructively
- responding constructively to peers' work
- soliciting and using peer feedback effectively
- achieving team goals

Research

Understand and use various research methods and sources to produce professional documents, including:

- analyzing historical and contemporary contexts
- locating, evaluating, and using print and online information selectively for particular audiences and purposes
- triangulating sources of evidence

Technology

Use and evaluate the writing technologies frequently employed in the workplace, such as emailing, instant

messaging, image editing, video editing, presentation design and delivery, HTML editing, Web browsing, content management, and desktop publishing technologies.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

In order to accomplish these course goals, students must come to each class prepared. This means coming to class on time and completing readings and outside assignments. Active and informed participation in class discussions and collaborative work is also crucial. This means reading carefully and critically, bringing materials to class, and coming prepared to engage with the ideas and the class. Class investigations are participatory assignments that include critical and active discussions as well as in-class collaborative work. Collaboration is one of the most important components to the success of the course.

GRADING SCALE

Final grades are calculated according to the following point-based scale:

A	93-100 points	C	73-76 points
A-	90-92 points	C-	70-72 points
B+	87-89 points	D+	67-69 points
B	83-86 points	D	63-66 points
B-	80-82 points	D-	60-62 points
C+	77-79 points	F	59 points and below

Here is the general course rubric:

A	Achievement <i>outstanding</i> relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B	Achievement <i>significantly above</i> the level necessary to meet course requirements.
C	Achievement <i>meeting</i> the basic course requirements in every respect.
D	Achievement worthy of credit even though it does not fully meet the basic course requirements every respect.
F	Performance failing to meet the basic course requirements.

ASSESSMENT

Following the principles set out in *Technical Communication Today* and *Team Writing*, assessment throughout the semester is layered across different audiences, which include the instructor, classmates, team members, and the audiences of the organization. *TCT* describes four kinds of audiences that sync up with different layers of assessment:

Primary Audience

This is the audience who takes action or otherwise responds to a document's argument. The primary audience for a television commercial is the desired demographic, for instance, hipsters looking for a new stereo. With respect to this course, the primary

audience is often those people addressed or served by the organization: clients, voters, or students on campus.

Secondary Audience

These are audiences with whom the primary audience consults or asks for expert advice. The secondary audience for a television commercial advertizing a new stereo might be a hipster's friend who has recently purchased a new stereo or who has expert knowledge of stereos. Secondary audiences vary and are multiple, and for this project include anyone with whom the primary audience might consult.

Tertiary Audience

This is an audience, while neither targeted nor consulted, that has an interest in the project, subject matter, or argument. A tertiary audience for a television commercial could be a media studies professor examining trends in the marketing of electronics or a cultural studies professor interested in hipster culture. Tertiary audiences for student projects might be similar organizations, political operatives, and university officials.

Gatekeeping Audience

A gatekeeper is typically someone in a supervisory or advisory role *within* an organization. They are often in a position to decide whether the document goes public or not. Again, in the example of the television commercial the gatekeeping audience might include the stereo company's general legal counsel (what claims can or can't the commercial make) or the advertizing firm's market researcher (what The Shins song should be playing during the commercial). In this course, the instructor serves this role, but team members likewise act as gatekeepers for any collaboratively produced document.

It is important to remember that these are not static designations. While the instructor is a gatekeeping audience for any document produced by student organizations for an audience, he is the primary audience for any report or work log. In the case of individual work logs, fellow group members are often tertiary audiences (interested in who is taking credit for what). Audiences are necessarily complex: the above categories are a way to conceptualize audiences each and every time one sets out to communicate.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is welcomed, expected, and mandatory. To best utilize time, students must come to class on time. Students are considered absent if they are 1) more than 10 minutes late, 2) doing computer activities unrelated to in-class assignments, 3) unprepared for class, and/or 4) not in class at all. There is regular in-class work and/or a sign-in sheet to record attendance and preparation for class. Attendance in this course is treated as attendance would be in a professional setting

and with the understanding that this course meets but once a week. Students have one sick day they may take no questions asked. Students are, however, responsible for all work assigned, due, or completed the days they are absent. (See attachment “No Nonsense Attendance Policy”) This is particularly true for the days when students work in their teams (presentations, conferences, in-class exercises). If a student foresees an absence, they should make arrangements with the instructor and/or team members. After two absences, students must attend a conference with the instructor to discuss whether they should continue in this course.

In the event of inclement weather or other events that make meeting as a class impossible, the work of the course will continue online (as directed by the instructor) through the course cite.

PLAGIARISM

All written work submitted for a grade in this course must be the product of the student’s own composition. With collaborative projects, of course, ideas should be representative of the team’s own work.

Plagiarism is the act of presenting as your own work another individual’s ideas, words, data, or research material. The concept applies equally to written, spoken, or electronic texts, published or unpublished. All ideas and quotations borrowed from any source must be acknowledged: students should always give the name of the author, the title of the text cited, and the page number(s) of the citation. Correct citation is also required. This includes quote marks around quoted material and block quotes for quotes running longer than four lines. See *TCT* for help with avoiding plagiarism.

SLU Statement of Academic Integrity

Students are expected to be honest in their academic work. The University reserves the right to penalize any student whose academic conduct at any time is, in its judgment, detrimental to the University. Such conduct shall include cases of plagiarism, collusion, cheating, giving or receiving or offering or soliciting information in examinations, or the use of previously prepared material in examinations or quizzes. Violations should be reported to your course instructor, who will investigate and adjudicate them according to the policy on academic honesty of the College of Arts and Sciences. If the charges are found to be true, the student may be liable for academic or disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion by the University. Students should review the College of Arts and Sciences policy on Academic Honesty at <http://www.slu.edu/x16363.xml>.

STUDENT CONDUCT

This course’s code of student conduct is informed by Saint Louis University’s own code of student conduct, best encapsulated by the following statement:

“All members of the University community are expected to contribute to the development and sustainability of community through word and action. Our community is characterized by respect for the dignity of others, honesty, and the pursuit of truth.”

Insults, slurs, or attacks of any kind are not allowed in this class (this includes f2f meetings and on the course site). Any student who engages in this type of behavior in the classroom will be permanently removed from the class. This code of conduct is equally important to maintain during group meetings outside of class. In order to have an effective teaching and learning environment we must practice both respect and tolerance. The remainder of the university’s code of student conduct can be found at <http://www.slu.edu/x24293.xml>.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. Students who think they might benefit from these resources can find out more about:

- Course-level support (e.g., faculty member, departmental resources, etc.) by asking the course instructor.
- University-level support (e.g., tutoring/writing services, Disability Services) by visiting the Student Success Center (BSC 331) or by going to www.slu.edu/success.

Students who believe that, due to a disability, they could benefit from academic accommodations are encouraged to contact Disability Services at 314-977-8885 or visit the Student Success Center. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries.

Course instructors support student accommodation requests when an approved letter from Disability Services has been received and when students discuss these accommodations with the instructor after receipt of the approved letter.

