

**University of Massachusetts Amherst
Department of Communication
COMM 375: Writing as Communication (3cr)
Fall 2022**

Class meeting: M & W 2:30-3:45PM

Professor: Nora Suren

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Room: Hasbrouck 242

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Office Hours: M & W 1-2:30PM

Course Description

According to the UMass Writing Program, the Junior Year Writing (JYW) Program provides all undergraduate students with practice in the writing of their chosen field of study. Building on the general writing that students practice in CW112, JYW courses foster more advanced writing and thinking within field-specific academic or professional communities. Junior Year Writing became a requirement of all students at UMass in 1984 to provide the opportunity for them to engage in research practices and professional writing within their discipline, field, or major. COMM 375: Writing as Communication, serves this purpose by introducing students to the writing conventions and genres related to the discipline of Communication, ranging from research papers to critical reviews. It also emphasizes writing as a form of communication itself and a number of issues concerning the politics of writing and research.

Course objectives & outcomes

The objectives of this course are to:

- Advance critical thinking and critical reading skills
- Develop research and composition techniques
- Compose well-organized and compelling writing within the field of Communication
- Understand and make regular application of various writing techniques connected to the field of Communication;
- Engage consistently in the writing process, including research, outlines, proposals, drafts/revisions, peer, and instructor review;
- Develop a portfolio of writing that demonstrates your interests and professional development.

Structure of the course

This course is designed to make explicit the importance of writing as well as the writing process. You will be assigned readings for which you will be responsible for completing by the date listed in the syllabus. Most classes will include a discussion that reviews the reading and introduces, or moves through, the writing topic to be addressed. We will do in-class activities to practice both reading comprehension and how to translate that to writing. You may do most of your reading and writing as homework and will need to be prepared, at the start of class, with the readings/writings completed.

Communication outside of class

If you need to talk with me on a topic that requires an immediate answer, please email me. Usually, I will answer your emails in 24 hours (48 hours during the weekends). If you think you need a lengthier discussion or more extensive feedback on your work than I already provided, I am happy to meet you during my office hours or schedule a meeting.

Pronoun policy

Everyone has the right to be addressed and referred to by the name and pronouns that correspond

to their gender identity, including the use of gender-inclusive pronouns. Class rosters have a student's legal first name, unless they have entered a preferred/chosen first name on SPIRE. Students may opt-in to include pronouns on Spire, but this is not automatic; students will be asked to indicate the pronouns they use for themselves. A student's chosen name and pronouns are to be respected at all times, and by all members of the class, in the classroom.

Disability services

All students registered with Disability Services will be contacted by me privately to discuss accommodations and to make sure our lines of communication are open. Any student with concerns about their ability to complete the requirements of this (or any) course should see me privately as soon as possible and/or contact Disability Services for accommodation information (<http://www.umass.edu/disability>). The university has comprehensive resources to make your university experience as productive as possible. Please do not hesitate to ask for information and/or assistance.

Academic Plagiarism and Dishonesty

Plagiarism and/or cheating is not tolerated and will result in failing the course. Consult University rules and guidelines regarding this serious breach of ethics. In addition, turning in the same or similar papers to this and/or another course without first discussing it with the professor(s) is considered academic dishonesty; in this class, doing this will result in failing the assignment.

Required Reading

All readings available electronically on class Moodle page

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Attendance and Participation	10%
Assignment #1: Summarizing for efficiency	10%
Assignment #2: Mini research paper	30%
Assignment #3: Public critique	10%
Assignment #4: Blog post	10%
Assignment #5: Public relations/press release	10%
Assignment #6: Social media post	10%
Assignment #7: Resume, cover letter, and elevator pitch	5%
Assignment #8: Professional correspondence	5%

Assignment #1: Summarizing for efficiency (10% of final grade)

Due date:	Assignment	percentage
09/28	Summary notes	5%
09/28	Summary write-up	5%

This class is focused on developing your writing in communication. One key to successful writing is to begin with active reading and translation of that reading into notes and formal writing. A review is a formal assessment of a topic, with evidence provided to illustrate/prove the author's point. The final draft of this review will be 1-2 pages, plus appropriate citations. Please follow the style guide as listed in the syllabus.

Assignment #2: Mini research paper (30% of final grade)

Due dates:	Assignment	percentage
10/05	Topic, 'so what' Q, outline	5%
10/12	Rough draft	5%
10/12	Peer review	5%
10/17	Revised rough draft	5%
10/26	Final paper (3-5pages)	10%

All writing, no matter what its subject matter, requires some degree of research, so we begin with a 'mini' research paper on a topic of your choosing. The research paper serves two functions: (1) guides you through a formal, closely guided process of research; and (2) invites you to closely study one particular topic. For this paper, you will pick something very specific and conduct research on it and its connection to communication. We will break the research process into stages, with firm deadlines, clear expectations and feedback (from peer and instructor) throughout the process. *I anticipate that you will spend 1-2 hours per week, plus an additional 1-2 hours once you start writing, on this assignment in order for it to be successful.*

Please note: This topic *may* be the basis of all your writing in this class, if you choose. Over the course of the semester, you will create different styles of writing; addressing one topic from multiple angles may provide rich insight into your thinking, organizing, and writing process. It is not required to stick with the same topic, but if it is something you are interested in doing, you are more than welcome.

You must choose a *specific* topic. Less is more: Our goal is to work towards thick analysis of one topic and its connection to communication. By the conclusion of this assignment, you will be a mini-expert on this topic and will have a solid foundation for the process of research that can be applied to any content/subject matter.

Research paper breakdown:

1. *Topic, outline & references:* What you want to study; why it matters ("so what" question), outline, references
2. *Rough draft:* A complete draft
3. In-class peer review
4. Revised rough draft
5. Final paper due

SUBMITTING WORK

ALL work on the research project must be submitted on Moodle.

Research Topic

The first step in a research project is to choose the topic. All research answers the "so what" question: What is the topic and why does it matter? How will studying this topic benefit society? Most research fills a gap in understanding. And because this is a mini-research paper, be sure to consider a *manageable* topic: What can be studied in just a few weeks, and reported on in just a few pages?

Reading/Source Guidelines

Research for your paper should include 2-3 scholarly texts and 1-2 pop culture texts. All electronic sources must be verifiable. 'Scholarly texts' are academic journal articles (can be found electronically through the UMass library) and books published by academic publishers (such as University-named

presses). 'Pop culture' sources are those found in the mainstream media, such as newspapers, magazines (in print or online), movies (including documentaries), TV shows, music, games, blogs, podcasts, etc.

Outline

Once you have your topic and your sources, you'll want to build an outline that lays out, visually, your whole paper.

Rough draft

You will complete a rough draft due, which will be peer & instructor reviewed in class (this means, your draft must be completed by the beginning of our class). You will submit revisions by the next class. This should be your *complete* paper and should grow from the outline.

Final paper

Your final paper should be just that: *final*. Your paper must unfold as an argument - with evidence to support and supplement your analysis. You will write this paper as a critical scholar and will be graded on the depth of your knowledge and understanding of the chosen text and understanding of its connection to the mass media with a quality application of research and source material. In addition to marking your paper on your presentation of the above, I look for clarity of writing, organized flow and transparent structure. This means a clear thesis in the introductory paragraph followed by an appropriate body and conclusion with no glaring spelling or grammatical errors.

Notes on the research process & grading

Each part of the paper is broken into small sections. Full participation in the revision process and peer review is also part of the final paper grade and should be taken as seriously as each portion of your own research and writing. Turning in pieces of the assignment (or the final paper) late will result in grade penalty; please see syllabus for details.

Assignment #3: Public critique (10% of final grade)

Due dates:	Assignment	percentage
10/31	First draft	5%
11/2	Final draft	5%

A key component of writing for communication is the public critique. The art of the public critique is that it may serve to both inform the public of a particular topic/issue and, in turn, may shift public opinion. The final version of this public critique should be 1-2 pages long. You may choose to keep your topic from your mini-research paper and adapt the writing to the style of public critique, or you may choose an entirely new topic.

Please note: Just because this writing is *shorter* than the mini-research paper does not mean it is *easier*; fewer words sometimes take more work in order to be most effective. Your final grade for this assignment will be composed of all components of the writing process, meeting the deadlines, being prepared for your classmates with the peer review, and adhering to the style structure and format.

Assignment #4: Blog post (10% of final grade)

Due dates:	Assignment	percentage
11/7	Draft blog post	5%
11/9	Final draft	5%

A blog post often a quick, punchy, casual type of writing. But don't be fooled! Just because most blog posts are short, this does not mean they are easy to write. In order to be effective, each word must be carefully chosen. The final version of this blog post should be 1-1½ pages long. You may choose to keep your topic from your mini-research paper and adapt the writing to the style of a blog post, or you may choose an entirely new topic.

While this is a casual style of writing, and may take on a creative format, you must follow a similar drafting, reviewing, and finalizing process. Your final grade for this assignment will be composed of all components of the writing process, meeting the deadlines, being prepared for your classmates with the peer review, and adhering to the style structure and format.

Assignment #5: Public relations/press release (10% of final grade)

Due dates:	Assignment	percentage
11/14	Draft of pr/press release	5%
11/16	Final draft	5%

Public relations writing introduces audiences to a product, event, or change to a company. It is generally short, casual in tone, and gets to the point of the topic quickly. The final draft of this press release should be 1-2 paragraphs long. You may choose to keep your topic from your mini-research paper and adapt the writing to the style of a press release, or you may choose an entirely new topic.

Your final grade for this assignment will be composed of all components of the writing process, meeting the deadlines, being prepared for your classmates with the peer review, and adhering to the style structure and format.

Assignment #6: Formal social media posts (10% of final grade)

Due dates:	Assignment	percentage
11/21	Draft social media posts	5%
11/28	Final draft of social media posts	5%

Professional social media posts get their point across within a limited space and assume a short attention span of its audience. You may be limited in word count (ex: 140 chars for a Tweet) or time (up to 60 seconds for a TikTok video or Instagram reel). The final draft of the social media post should be 3 versions: A Facebook post; the script for a 60-second Instagram reel or TikTok video; and a 140 character Tweet. The different posts may refer to each other (as a way to guide readers/viewers) or may be different versions of the same message). You may choose to keep your topic from your mini-research paper and adapt the writing to the style of social media posts, or you may choose an entirely new topic.

Your final grade for this assignment will be composed of all components of the writing process, meeting the deadlines, being prepared for your classmates with the peer review, and adhering to the style structure and format.

**Assignment #7: Resume, cover letter, & elevator pitch
(5% of final grade)**

Due dates:	Assignment	percentage
11/30	Finalize resumes and cover letters	5%

Your resume and cover letter introduce you, professionally, to people who are in a position to hire you; they must speak for you (and about you) in a way that makes people want to know you more. Your elevator pitch is a short statement where you introduce yourself, your interests, and make an ask (all within a short elevator ride). While the elevator pitch may happen spontaneously, if you are prepared with your statement, you may have the opportunity to access a professional in your field sooner rather than later. Your final grade for this assignment will be composed of all components of the writing process, meeting the deadlines, being prepared for your classmates with the peer review, and adhering to the style structure and format.

**Assignment #8: Professional email and thank you note
(5% of final grade)**

Due dates:	Assignment	percentage
12/7	Email and thank you note	5%

One way you may begin to meet people in professional circles is via email; you may use email to submit your resume or cover letter to someone, you may use it to reach out to someone with a professional request, you may use it to seek out information from a stranger. Presuming you get what you ask for – a job interview, a professional contact, a question answered – or when you have been given an award, a prize, or a gift, a thank you note is always appreciated. While some employers may not comment on, or respond to, thank you notes, it is entirely plausible that they will notice, negatively, when thank you notes have not been sent. Therefore, your final writing assignment is to construct a professional email and thank you note template. Both your email and your thank you note should be one paragraph each, with appropriate greetings and signatures. Your final grade for this assignment will be composed of all components of the writing process, meeting the deadlines, being prepared for your classmates with the peer review, and adhering to the style structure and format.

Attendance and Participation (10% of final grade)

Regular attendance is mandatory. Everyone is expected to attend all classes and arrive on time. In-class writing activities and discussions cannot be made up, and class participation will be factored into final grades. Three unexcused absences will be allowed. After these three, students who are unexcused for a class will have their final grade reduced by one letter (for example, an A would become an A-). Excused absences (for religious observances, field trips, athletics, health, and related circumstances) are not subject to this policy. When possible, advanced notice of absences must be provided. Please consult this website for more information:

<http://www.umass.edu/registrar/students/policies-and-practices/class-absence-policy>

Writing assignments descriptions

All writing assignments, including grade percentages, are detailed in the Writing Guidelines document.

Style Manual

Students are strongly urged to purchase/bookmark at least one style manual. A good style manual will help to improve the organization and composition of your written work and, used properly, should help to ensure the proper citation of sources. MLA, APA, and Chicago are the most commonly used styles in our field, available online for free or in any academic bookstore if you prefer a hard copy:

APA: <http://www.apastyle.org> or <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

MLA: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_style_introduction.html

Chicago: <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>

Late Assignments

NO late assignments are accepted without special permission prior to the due date. With prior permission, late assignments will be accepted for a reduced grade (varies per assignment). No assignment will be accepted two weeks after the initial due date.

Research & writing support

For any additional support for research for any of your writing assignments, please contact our Communication liaison Jeremy Smith: <https://www.library.umass.edu/news/profile/jeremy-smith>

For any additional support for your writing process, please contact the UMass Writing Center: <https://www.umass.edu/writing-center/writing-center-1>

Evaluation

A= Excellent

Outstanding work in all respects. This work demonstrates comprehensive and solid understanding of course material, and presents thoughtful interpretations, well-focused and original insights, and well-reasoned commentary and analysis. Includes skillful use of source material, illuminating examples and illustrations, and fluent verbal/written expression. "A" work is coherent, fluent, and thorough and shows some creative flair.

B= Good

This work demonstrates a complete and accurate understanding of course material, presents a reasonable degree of insight and broad level of analysis. Work reflects competence, but stays at general or predictable level of understanding. Source material, along with examples and illustrations, are used appropriately and articulation/writing is clear. "B" work is reasonable, clear, appropriate and complete.

C= Adequate/Fair

This work demonstrates understanding that covers most or some of the basics but which remains superficial, incomplete, or expresses some important errors or weaknesses. Source material may be used inadequately or inappropriately. The work may lack concrete, specific example and illustrations, and articulation/writing may be vague or hard to follow.

D= Unsatisfactory

This work demonstrates a serious lack of understanding, and fails to express the most rudimentary aspects of the course. Sources may be used entirely inappropriately or not at all. The work may be inarticulate or extremely difficult to read.

Plus (+) or minus (-) grades indicate your range with the aforementioned grades.

****Note on grading policy:** I aim to mark your work in terms of content, not format. If your assignments are technically sloppy (overwhelming spelling/ grammar/ format/ stylistic errors), I will be forced to grade for format and not content – this will severely harm your grade. If you are concerned about your technical writing skills, please seek help well before the assignment is due.

Final grade breakdown

A: 93-100%

A-: 90-92.99%

B+: 87- 89.99%

B: 83-86.99%

B-: 80-82.99%

C+: 77-79.99%

C: 73-76.99%

C-: 70-72.99%

D+: 67-69.99%

D: 60-66.99%

F: 0-59.99%

General grading rubric; specific rubrics will be provided for each assignment

(failure to D) *	(C range)	(B range)	(A range)
Does not address subject clearly; does not follow format; no connection to reading/research *0 = not turned in/plagiarized	Address topic, but with minimal connection; minimal evidence of revision/copy editing	Demonstrated application of topic/issue; mostly well organized, minimal grammar/structural errors, demonstrated competent thinking about specific topic, demonstrates thinking about topic/subject	Sophisticated application of topic/subject; transparent format & structure adherence; free of grammar/structural errors, thinks deeply about topic/subject as well as writing style

Schedule of Classes

*classes are subject to change based on
interests of class and direction in which class proceeds*

Date:	Topic/Readings
Sept 7:	Greetings, overview, and introductions
Sept 12:	What is writing for communication? Why practice writing? Reading/viewing: <i>Start with your why</i> , Roxane Gay https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rml6KQILIsA <i>Studying communication</i> , Rebecca B. Rubin, Alan M. Rubin, Paul M. Haidakis, & Linda J. Piele Activity: Free write
Sept 14:	Reading for comprehension: Read to write; write to read Reading: <i>Active reading strategies: Remember and analyze what you read</i> https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/active-reading-strategies <i>New insights into the novel? Try reading 300</i> , Chitra Divakaruni https://www.nytimes.com/2001/02/12/books/writers-on-writing-new-insights-into-the-novel-try-reading-300.html Activity: As a class, pick a program to listen to from the writers on writing blog spot (https://writersonwriting.blogspot.com/)
Sept 19:	Reading and writing for comprehension: The value of grammar, sentence structure, format Reading: <i>Eats, Shoots, and Leaves</i> {selections}, Lynne Truss Activity: As a class, choose a random article and evaluate it for grammar, structure, and format
Sept 21:	Reading effective writing Reading: <i>Skywoman falling</i> , Robin Wall Kimmerer Activity: Shared reading analysis; what makes this reading effective?
Sept 26:	Assignment #1: Summarizing for efficiency: What is this reading about? Reading: <i>Indigenous music and the question of authenticity</i> , Ashley Cordes http://mediacommons.org/imr/content/indigenous-music-and-question-authenticity Activity: In class, summarize together
Sept 28:	Assignment #1: Summarizing for efficiency: What is this reading about? Reading: <i>Letter to my son</i> , Ta-Nehisi Coates https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/07/tanehisi-coates-between-the-world-and-me/397619/ Activity: In class, summarize individually; write up review
Oct 3:	Assignment #2: Mini research paper & Kimberlee Perez Reading: <i>The mechanics of progress</i> , Eviatar Zerubavel <i>Thinking in print</i> , Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams Activity: Assignment breakdown: Topic/"so what" question; outline

- Oct 5: **Assignment #2: Mini research paper**
 Reading: *Making good arguments: An overview*, Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams
 Activity: Moving from topic to draft
Due in class: Topic, outline, references
- Oct 10: **No Class – Indigenous Peoples Day**
- Oct 12: **Why drafting and revision matters**
 Reading: *Planning and drafting*, Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams
Shitty first drafts, Anne Lamott
<https://wrd.as.uky.edu/sites/default/files/1-Shitty%20First%20Drafts.pdf>
 Activity: Peer review of drafts; follow rubric guidelines
Due in class: Initial rough draft
- Oct 17: **Writing IS struggle (and that's okay)**
 Listening: Weike Way, author of *Joan is okay*, on Writers on Writing
<https://writersonwriting.blogspot.com/2022/02/weike-wang-author-of-joan-is-okay-on.html>
 Honoreé Fanon Jeffers *The love song of WEB DuBois*, on Writers on Writing
<https://writersonwriting.blogspot.com/2021/08/honoree-fanon-jeffers-love-songs-of.html>
- Oct 19: **Practicing peer review**
 Activity: Sharing and reviewing; provide students with review rubric
Due in class: peer review
- Oct 24: **Assignment #2: Mini research paper**
 Activity: Sharing and reviewing
Due in class: rough draft, with revisions
- Oct 26: **Assignment #3: Public critique**
 Reading: *Thirteen ways of looking at a black man [The Simpson trial]*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
 Activity: Choose a public issue/adapt research paper topic; prepare a critique
Due in class: Final draft, mini research paper
- Oct 31: **Assignment #3: Public critique**
Due in class: Draft of public critique
- Nov 2: **Assignment #4: Blog post**
miranda??? texting me???? Samantha Irby
https://bitchesgottaeat.substack.com/p/miranda-texting-me?utm_source=url
 Samantha Irby: 'This is the glamorous life of a writer,' Scott Simon
<https://www.npr.org/2020/03/28/822561360/samantha-irby-this-is-the-glamorous-life-of-a-writer>
 Activity: Choose a topic/adapt research paper topic; prepare a blog (review: active reading, summarizing, notes, interpretation)

Due in class: final draft, public critique

- Nov 7: **Assignment #4: Blog post**
Activity: Draft of blog post due
- Nov 9: **Assignment #5: Public relations/press release**
15 best press release examples by type (and why they work), Kelly Main
<https://fitsmallbusiness.com/press-release-examples/>
Activity: Choose a current events topic/product release; review writing techniques
Due in class: Final draft, blog post
- Nov 14: **Assignment #5: Public relations/press release**
Activity: Draft of public relations/press release due
- Nov 16: **Assignment #6: Formal social media posts**
How one stupid tweet blew up Justine Sacco's life, Jon Ronson
<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/15/magazine/how-one-stupid-tweet-ruined-justine-saccos-life.html>
Activity: Choose a topic/adapt research paper topic to write a formal social media post(s); work on the draft
Due in class: Final draft, public relations/press release
- Nov 21: **Assignment #6: Formal social media posts**
Activity: Draft of formal social media post(s)
- Nov 23: **No class – Thanksgiving holiday**
- Nov 28: **Assignment #7: Resume, cover letter, elevator pitch**
Reading: *Resume vs. cover letter: What's the difference?*
<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/resume-vs-cover-letter#:~:text=A%20resume%20is%20a%20broad,job%20you're%20applying%20to.>
How to write a cover letter in 2022: Beginner's guide
<https://novoresume.com/career-blog/how-to-write-a-cover-letter-guide>
Reading: *How to create and elevator pitch, with examples*, Alison Doyle
<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/elevator-speech-examples-and-writing-tips-2061976>
Class activity: Write up a draft of a resume and a cover letter
- Nov 30: **Assignment #7: Resume, cover letter, elevator pitch**
Class activity: Practice elevator pitch
Due in class: Final drafts of resumes and cover letters
Finalize social media post(s)
- Dec 5: **Assignment #8: Professional correspondence (emails, thank you notes)**
Reading: *Bad email examples*
<https://schoolwires.henry.k12.ga.us/cms/lib/GA01000549/Centricity/Domain/7220/Professional%20Communicating%20Assignment.pdf>

Why you must send a thank you note and how to do it, Adam Connors
<https://www.networkwise.com/why-send-thank-you-note-and-how-to-do-it/>
Activity: Build email & thank-you note templates

Dec 7: **Assignment #8: Professional correspondence (emails, thank you notes)**
Activity: Peer review of professional emails, thank you notes
Due in class: email, thank you note template
Last class, final reflections