

## **PUBP 710: Business and Professional Writing**

**Spring 2007**

**Arlington Campus 332**

**7:20 - 10:00 p.m., Wednesday evenings**

*Dr. Brien Benson*

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Office hours: Thur. 10-12

or by appointment

This course teaches the principles of effective expository writing that apply in any professional environment – business, government, the professions, the academic world. While different organizations may require different report formats and specialized vocabulary, the basics of good writing are a constant.

The course takes a “building block” approach. We start with word usage, including the problem of excess verbiage. We then discuss sentence structure, including diagramming. We then examine the paragraph, including topic sentences.

With these building blocks in mind, we consider several genres of writing -- the news story, the editorial, the report, the research paper, and, finally, fiction.

The course concentrates on three fundamentals of effective writing: clarity, conciseness, and logic.

Clarity of expression starts with the individual word and extends thru the sentence and paragraph to the whole composition. The measure of clarity, in this course, is whether an “educated layman” can readily understand what is written.

The second principle of effective writing is conciseness. Being concise does not necessarily mean being brief. Instead, it means that words are not wasted. The line of thought does not meander. Every passage contributes directly to the paper’s central line of argument.

The third principle of effective writing is logic. By “logic” we mean a clear statement of the question under consideration and the assumptions that are made, the use of relevant and compelling evidence, a clear line of reasoning, and valid conclusions.

Homework will include original pieces and critiques of published pieces.

Required reading: Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*;; Lunsford, *Easy Writer*

## Course Schedule

Week 1 (Jan. 24). Course overview.

Week 2 (Jan. 31). Word usage. Wordiness.

Week 3 (Feb. 7). Sentences. Sentence structure. Diagramming.

Week 4 (Feb. 14). Paragraphs

Week 5 (Feb. 21). Journalism

Week 6 (Feb. 28). Journalism: trade stories (guest Conway)

Week 7 (March 7). Persuasive writing: editorials

Week 8 (March 21). Persuasive writing: speeches

Week 9 (March 28). Single unifying idea

Week 10 (April 4). Reports

Week 11 (April 11). Research papers

Week 12 (April 18). Executive summaries

Week 13 (April 25). Fiction

Week 14 (May 2). Final class (no exam). Review

*Homework due weekly, by 6 p.m. Tuesday, unless instructed otherwise.*

## PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is a serious matter. It is equivalent to theft. Experience shows that many George Mason students do not properly understand what constitutes plagiarism.

Plagiarism is quoting material, either verbatim or as a paraphrase, without acknowledging the source of the material. When the material is quoted verbatim, it must be either placed in quotation marks or set off as a block indent, and the source must be referenced in a footnote. When the material is paraphrased, quotation marks or indent are not required, but a footnote reference is required.

The Internet has dramatically increased plagiarism, as students can easily copy material from Internet sources directly into their papers, and then fail to give due credit, either intentionally or unintentionally. At the School of Public Policy we review student papers for undocumented quotations from Internet sources.

### *SPP Policy on Plagiarism*

The profession of scholarship and the intellectual life of a university as well as the field of public policy inquiry depend fundamentally on a foundation of trust. Thus any act of plagiarism strikes at the heart of the meaning of the university and the purpose of the School of Public Policy. It constitutes a serious breach of professional ethics and it is unacceptable.

Plagiarism is the use of another's words or ideas presented as one's own. It includes, among other things, the use of specific words, ideas, or frameworks that are the product of another's work. Honesty and thoroughness in citing sources is essential to professional accountability and personal responsibility. Appropriate citation is necessary so that arguments, evidence, and claims can be critically examined.

Plagiarism is wrong because of the injustice it does to the person whose ideas are stolen. But it is also wrong because it constitutes lying to one's professional colleagues. From a prudential perspective, it is shortsighted and self-defeating, and it can ruin a professional career.

The faculty of the School of Public Policy takes plagiarism seriously and has adopted a zero tolerance policy. Any plagiarized assignment will receive an automatic grade of "F." This may lead to failure for the course, resulting in dismissal from the University. This dismissal will be noted on the student's transcript. For foreign students who are on a university-sponsored visa (e.g. F-1, J-1 or J-2), dismissal also results in the revocation of their visa.

To help enforce the SPP policy on plagiarism, all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be compared with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit student's work without

prior permission from the student. Individual instructors may require that written work be submitted in electronic as well as printed form. The SPP policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace it or substitute for it.