

ENGLISH 434: SCIENCE AND MEDICAL WRITING

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Welcome to English 434, Science and Medical Writing. In this course, we will explore the intersecting fields of science writing and medical writing. You will learn how to write feature articles, news stories, profiles, white papers, grants, and other scientific and medical texts. You will also learn editing skills that will help you succeed in scientific and healthcare workplaces. Meanwhile, we will read and discuss classic and contemporary works in science writing and medical writing.

Science writing and medical writing, like all areas of professional writing, are currently evolving, converging, and expanding. The emergence of new media now means that science and medical writing include responsibilities like managing websites, posting on blogs, scripting podcasts, editing videos, and coordinating marketing narratives in social media. Science and medical writers are now all-around communication specialists, not just writers and editors. This evolution in the field has greatly expanded our responsibilities.

Fortunately, many things about our field are staying the same. Professional writers still need to—

- Tell a good story
- Describe things in exact detail
- Convert complex ideas into simple prose
- Explain cause and effects relationships
- Draw comparisons among similar and dissimilar things
- Edit the work of others
- Advocate for truth and reason.

In our assignments, we will concentrate on learning and applying these kinds of universal skills to science and medical writing, so you can succeed in these new paradigms.

This class will be rather practical in nature. We will be writing a collection of real and realistic professional-quality documents that you can add to your portfolio. I'm looking forward to a challenging semester. At the 400-level, I assume you are already employed or thinking about your impending employment. This course should make you more competitive in whatever career you are pursuing.

Course Texts

You can find the following books at the local bookstores or through Amazon.

A Field Guide for Science Writers: The Official Guide of the National Association of Science Writers, edited by Deborah Blum, Mary Knudson, Robin Marantz Henig. ISBN-13: 9780195174991

The Best American Science and Nature Writing, 2016, edited by Amy Stewart, ISBN-13: 978-0544748996

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, by Rebecca Skloot, ISBN-13: 978-0804190107

Assignments

The assignments for the course are listed below. Here is the weight on each assignment, adding up to the final grade:

Sequence One: Science Writing

- News Article In Class
- Explainer 10 percent
- Feature Article 20 percent

Sequence Two: Medical Writing

- Protocol Makeover In Class
- Historical Narrative Podcast (Team) 10 percent
- Educational Materials 20 percent

Sequence Three: Proposing Research or Projects

- Proposal Poster Presentation 10 percent
- Research or Project Proposal 20 percent

Blackboard Challenges

10 percent

Your documents should be professionally designed. That means your work should look like professionally designed documents, not double-spaced college papers.

At the end of these policies, I have included a description of each grade and what it takes to receive that grade on an assignment. If you are a person who wants or *needs* a particular grade in this course, start working toward that grade now. Don't wait until the end (or even the middle) of the semester to decide that you need a B or an A.

Grading

Personally, I think grading is a necessary evil. In my mind, a good grade is not a judgment about whether you are a good person or whether you are smart. It is merely a rating of your work in comparison to the objectives of the assignment and the work of others in the class. If you want a

good grade in a course, work as hard as you can—grades have a way of taking care of themselves.

At all costs, I try to be fair when I put a grade on a paper. Nevertheless, if you think I have misjudged or misinterpreted your work, don't get angry. Come to my office during office hours and talk to me about it. I will not discuss a grade in the classroom, but I don't mind if you come to my office to talk about how I'm evaluating your work.

Here's the meaning behind the numbers I put on your work (you can use these statements as clues about how you might work toward a higher grade):

90-100 (A- to A)—You did what the assignment asked for at a high quality level, *and your work shows originality and creativity*. Work in this range shows all the qualities listed below for a B; but it also demonstrates that you took extra steps to be original or creative in developing content, solving a problem, or developing a verbal or visual style.

80 to 89 (B- to B+)—You did what the assignment asked of you at a high quality level. Work in this range needs little revision, is complete in content, is organized well, and shows special attention to style and visual design.

70 to 79 (C- to C+)—You did what the assignment asked of you. Work in this range tends to need some revision, but it is complete in content and the organization is logical. The style, verbal and visual, is straightforward but unremarkable.

60-69 (D to D+)—You did what the assignment asked for at a low quality level. Work in this range tends to need significant revision. The content is often incomplete and the organization is hard to discern. Verbal and visual style is often non-existent or chaotic.

Below 60 (F)—Don't go here. I usually reserve the F for people who don't show up or don't do the work. If you give an assignment an honest try, I doubt you would receive an F. If you feel you put in your best effort and still received an F, you might consider dropping from the class.

Grammar

Let's hope you have mastered grammar by now. If you know you have a grammar problem or are weak in some area (like commas) go find a grammar handbook and get familiar with it. The Purdue OWL and Writing Lab can help you too. Typos and the rare grammar error happen to all of us, but consistent errors signal a lack of quality to editors and clients. Here's a hint: Your spellchecker is trying to help you, so don't ignore it.

Missed Attendance, Late Work, and Late Arrivals

Missed attendance, late work, and late arrival to class seem to be strongly related. Once in a great while, it is fine to miss class, hand in late work, or show up a bit late. Life puts unexpected obstacles in our way. However, since this class is designed to help you be more competitive in

the workplace, I will expect you to be consistently in class, on time, with your work finished. Employers will expect that from you, and I will too.

If you need to be late to class or absent, send me an e-mail telling me you are going to be late or absent. If you need to hand work in late, send me an e-mail that tells me 1) the work will be late and 2) when you will have it completed. That will buy you an extra day or two. If I don't receive the e-mail, your work will be assessed a 5 percent penalty each day it's late.

Now, some people are chronically absent or late to class. If you are one of those people, I invite you to see this class as an opportunity to add some discipline to your life (better here than at your job). Do it for yourself, not for me. You will be pleasantly surprised to see how many of life's annoyances evaporate when you are consistently present and on time.

For those people who can't get to class or arrive on time, here are some guidelines I follow in these matters. Since this is a twice a week course, your fifth absence will cost you a whole letter grade for the course (e.g. A becomes a B, C+ becomes a D+). Your seventh absence will mean a "no pass" for the course. I hope you will drop the course before we reach that point. Your third late arrival to class will be marked as one absence. Afterward, each late arrival will be counted as half an absence.

If you can't abide by these rules of the class, then please drop now. You don't want to find out the hard way that I'm serious about attendance, late work, and late arrivals.

Professionalism

Please turn off and stow your mobile phone and any other electronic beeping menaces before you come to class. We will be using laptops in class for research and drafting, but refrain from checking e-mail, monitoring social networking, or reading websites that are not related to the class.

Also, if history is our guide, I expect us to have some passionate discussions in the class. Be mindful of situations where you might cross over into provocation or verbal abuse. Go out of your way to be courteous and respectful of the ideas and views of others.

Grief Absence Policy

Students will be excused for funeral leave and given the opportunity to earn equivalent credit and to demonstrate evidence of meeting the learning outcomes for missed assignments or assessments in the event of the death of a member of the student's family. A student should contact the Office of the Dean of Students (ODOS) to request that a notice of his or her leave be sent to instructors. The student will provide documentation of the death or funeral service attended to the ODOS.

Equal Access

I will make any reasonable accommodations if you have special needs. If you have a disability that might affect your performance in this course, please tell me about it during the first two weeks of class. Your disability must be registered with Disability Resource Center through the Dean of Students for me to make accommodations.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

Purdue Honor Pledge: *“As a Boilermaker pursuing academic excellence, I pledge to be honest and true in all that I do. Accountable together – We are Purdue.”*

Integrity is especially important in professional writing, because you need to learn how to do your own work, and you don't want to run afoul of copyright laws. You will be responsible for producing original work in this course. If you hand in work that is not your own, you will be failed for the assignment and/or the course and reported to the Dean of Students. Here is the Dean of Students' definition of plagiarism:

Plagiarism is a special kind of academic dishonesty in which one person steals another person's ideas or words and falsely presents them as the plagiarist's own product. This is most likely to occur in the following ways:

- using the exact language of someone else without the use of quotation marks and without giving proper credit to the author
- presenting the sequence of ideas or arranging the material of someone else even though such is expressed in one's own words, without giving appropriate acknowledgment
- submitting a document written by someone else but representing it as one's own.

Source: <http://www.purdue.edu/odos/osrr/academic-integrity/index.html>

Emergencies

In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances. Information about changes to the course can be obtained by contacting the instructor via e-mail or phone. You are responsible for checking your Purdue e-mail on a frequent basis.

SCIENCE AND MEDICAL WRITING

Week	Subject	Readings and Assignments
Week One Jan. 9 & 11	What is Science Writing? Writing a News Story	FGSW Ch. 1-3, BASN (Goerge)
Week Two Jan. 16 & 18	Writing Explainers/White Paper Using Plain Style	In-Class: News Article (1/16) FGSW Ch. 4-6, BASN (Kunzig, Mann)
Week Three Jan. 23 & 25	Writing a Feature Articles Using Grabbers and Ledes	Due: explainer (1/23) FGSW Ch. 17-19, BASN (Kunzig, Mann)
Week Four Jan. 30 & Feb. 1	Being Creative, Finding Angles	FGSW Ch. 20-22, BASN (Oatman, Patel)
Week Five Feb. 6 & 8	Persuasive Style	BASN (Sacks, Telhan) Due: Feature Article (2/8)
Week Six Feb. 13 & 15	What is Medical Writing? Writing a Protocol	FGSW Ch. 23-25, BASN (Gefter, Mandavilli) In-Class: Protocol Makeover (2/15)
Week Seven Feb. 20 & 22	Writing a Historical Narrative	FGSW Ch. 26-29 BASN (Juhasz, Schulz)
Week Eight Feb. 27 & Mar. 1	Making a Podcast	FGSW Ch. 11-13, BASN (Ornes, Worth)
Week Nine Mar. 6 & 8	Editing Audio	Due: Historical Narrative Podcast (3/8)
Week Ten	Spring Break (No Meeting)	
Week Eleven Mar. 20 & 22	Writing Educational Materials Medical Humanities Event	FGSW Ch. 14-16, Skloot, Ch. 1-8
Week Twelve Mar. 27 & 29	Designing Documents Analyzing Audiences	Skloot, Ch. 9-16
Week Thirteen Apr. 3 & 5	Writing a Research Proposal Designing a Methodology	Due: Educational Materials (4/3) Skloot, Ch. 17-22
Week Fourteen Apr. 10 & 12	Making a Poster Presentation Conferences	Skloot, Ch. 23-30
Week Fifteen Apr. 17 & 19	Using Tables and Charts Editing Workshop	Due: Poster Presentation (4/17)
Week Sixteen Apr. 24 & 26	Careers in Science and Medical Writing	Skloot, Ch. 31-38
Finals Week	No Meeting	Due: Research or Project Proposal (5/1)