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ENG 3001-004: Advanced Composition: Writing in the Professional Workplace

Tim Engles
Eastern Illinois University

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English 3001: Advanced Composition
“Writing in the Professional Workplace”
Fall, 2013
Tues/Thurs, 9:30 – Coleman 3609

Instructor: Tim Engles
Office: CH 3831
Instructor’s e-mail: tdeengles@eiu.edu
Office hours: 11:00 – 12:00, Tues & Thurs, and by appointment

Textbooks:
- Professional and Public Writing (Coleman & Funk)
- Line by Line: How to Edit Your Own Writing (Cook)
- Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams (Lubrano)
- Working while Black: The Black Person’s Guide to Success in the White Workplace (Johnson)

COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
read the following sections carefully! these words constitute our contract, and participation in this course will require your written agreement to them

Description and Goals: The primary goal of this course is to help you improve your writing skills as you gather your forces toward a job in the sort of environment in which most of you will work after graduation—that is, a professional, “white-collar” environment (even if your collar won’t actually be white). You do more writing after you graduate than you probably realize, and the quality of your writing will definitely affect how the people you will work with perceive you. In addition to getting your writing skills up to speed for a professional audience, this course will help you anticipate and deal with some of the key features of your future workplace. Because we have a smaller group than those in most EIU courses, your individual writing problems will receive close attention, both from me and from your peers.

More specifically, our goals include the refinement of skills in the following areas:

- **Clean, smart prose**: improve your ability to write clear, concise, and meaningful sentences, to compose organized, well-developed paragraphs, and to identify and address recurring grammatical or mechanical problems specific to your own writing (these vary from writer to writer). We will spend time talking about why a grammatically correct, clear, efficient style is key to your success in college and in professional life. You will also be encouraged to push yourself toward new realizations while writing—good writing is not so much having something to say as it is discovering new thoughts and insights that would not have arisen if you had not started to write them down.

- **Critical reading**: improve your ability to read critically by questioning and evaluating what you read. Understanding the distinction between “opinion” and “reasoned argument” depends on your mastery of critical reading skills, which will enable you to discern and emulate the successful argumentative strategies of other writers. The better reader you are, the better writer you can be. In order to be a better reader, you have to
participate in what you are reading, actively deciphering the argument in all its parts, rather than passively receiving strings of words.

- **Minding your p's and q's**: misused words, missing commas, lack of subject/verb agreement, missing quotation marks, poorly incorporated quotations and inaccurate citations, misused semicolons... remember those bugaboos? Students sometimes complain that such "minor" mistakes in their papers are graded too heavily. However, they are important, so they will also be graded heavily in this course. Again, this course is meant to get your writing skills up to speed for professional life. *All of you are sure to write regularly during your careers,* and errors that students often consider “minor” actually stand out in professional life—they look sloppy and careless, and even worse, they can make the writer look sloppy and careless. Thus, I will work with you to find and eliminate your own habitual errors, and we will conduct in-class workshops and one-minute grammar lessons on the most common errors in advanced student writing.

- **Collaborative learning**: improve your ability to learn from others and to teach them about your own thinking, as well as what you know about writing. As in most professional settings, much of your success in this course will depend on the combined processes of producing several drafts of your writing and working with others, via peer critiques. You will also practice forming honest, thorough, and constructive commentary on your peers' writing, a process that will in turn improve your own writing skills.

- **Professional life**: learn about some of the more subtle aspects of how people interact and collaborate in the professional workplace. We will study significant factors that influence success in professional life, including such matters as race, class, and gender.

**Grades:** Your final grade will be determined as follows—

15% Essay on the kinds of writing you will do in your career  
15% An example of public writing that you could do in the future regarding the effects of race, class, or gender and your future career  
15% Presentation on topic of public writing assignment, including visual aid  
10% Two peer critiques of your classmates’ writings  
20% Sample job-seeking documents & a written self-critique of them  
15% Quizzes, other writings & class participation (including attendance)  
10% Final quiz (on content of daily grammar lessons and writing workshops)

**Regarding late papers:** Papers and other assignments will be graded on a 100-point scale, and late papers will be penalized fifteen points for each day they are late, beginning one hour after the time of day at which they are due. You will be submitting some assignments as email attachments, so **make sure that you’ve actually attached your assignment.** You should double-check by looking in your Sent folder at the message that you sent with the attached paper. **Sending an email message with no paper attached will result in the usual late penalties.**

**Regarding tardiness:** This is a small class, so late arrivals are disruptive—if for some bizarre reason you wish to get on my bad side, you can easily do so by developing the habit of arriving late for class. **If you will not be able to arrive on time for this class because of other commitments, drop it and take another section.** You are responsible for all assignments, whether you attend class or not. Consider getting the phone number or email of one or two other
students in class so that if you must be absent, you can find out about missed assignments before you come to class.

**E-mail Activity:** Enrollment in this class requires use of your EIU e-mail account, and you must check it frequently for messages pertaining to the course (that is, several times per week, at least). We will use our course listserv (or “e-mail discussion list”) for announcements and assignments. E-mail is also the quickest, easiest way to reach me if I am not in my office, and I welcome any and all e-mailed questions and comments.

Using e-mail is crucial for this course—if you do not send me an introductory e-mail message (tdengles@eiu.edu) by Friday, August 23 at 3:00 p.m., I will assume that you have chosen against fully participating in the course, and I will therefore drop you. In that message, (1) tell me which course you’re in (English 3001); (2) describe yourself in whatever way you choose, including your major and career aspirations; (3) write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with (or perhaps in part disagree with, which is fine, if you explain why) these course policies and requirements; and (4) as with all emails you send to instructors, “sign” it by adding your name at the end of the message.

Sending me this message will also constitute your “signature” of our course contract, that is, these policies and procedures that you are reading. I will then use your email address to subscribe you to the class listserv (you don’t have to subscribe to it yourself).

**Regarding the Writing Center:** Tutorial services are free at the English Department’s Writing Center, and students may drop in or schedule appointments during working hours (Room 3110 of Coleman Hall, http://www.eiu.edu/~writing). If you are aware of chronic problems with your writing, I strongly recommend that you make use of this service. While I will pay close attention to each student’s particular writing problems, I may advise some students to seek additional help at the Writing Center.

**Classroom Environment:** In class, I expect all of you to participate in discussions (class participation will be figured into your final grade) and to attend regularly. The best way to demonstrate that you are an active, engaged, and interested reader and writer is by contributing regularly to class discussions, and by paying close, respectful attention to what everyone else has to say. If you have questions, no matter how simple or complicated, go ahead and ask me, either in class or via e-mail—chances are that other people have the same question. Again, sensitive issues sometimes arise within a course of this sort, so we must respect the opinions of others; it will help if we try to respond to ideas, rather than to the particular person stating them. I do not plan to lecture in this class. You will learn better and more if we all contribute together to a positive, challenging, interesting learning environment.

In the interests of keeping everyone in class undistracted and focused, please do not read outside materials, chew gum, or eat food in class (drinking beverages is okay), and do not use a computer in class. Also, if you have a cell phone, be sure to silence it ahead of time, and do not check or write text messages during class. If you happen to be expecting an important or emergency call or text, be sure to let me know before class begins. Finally, please refrain from
“packing up” during the last few minutes of class; I will signal when the discussion is finished, and I promise to end each class by the time the period is over.

Attendance Policy: I will take attendance, and I expect you to attend class every day, on time, and prepared to discuss the material listed for that day on the “Daily Schedule.” Students who do not bring a copy of the assigned reading with them may be marked absent for that day. **If you have more than three absences this semester, your course grade will drop a full letter grade for each absence beyond three.** Also, missing a scheduled individual conference without giving me prior notification will result in the automatic lowering of your grade for the project by ten points. If you have to reschedule your conference, call or write to me via e-mail in advance; I will do the same if I have to reschedule.

For students with disabilities: If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, and if you have not already contacted the Office of Disability Services (581-6583), please do so as soon as possible.

Academic Honesty: I expect you to act honestly and do your own work in this class, and so does Eastern Illinois University. English 3001 is primarily a skills course, and doing your own work will definitely improve skills that you can then carry into your career. **It is also your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the English Department’s policy on plagiarism:** “Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—‘The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s original work’*(Random House Dictionary of the English Language)*—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.”
English 3001 Daily Schedule
Fall, 2013

This schedule may be subject to change; BE SURE to bring the appropriate book or books to class if a reading assignment is listed for that day; students who show up without a copy of the day’s reading assignment may be marked absent

WRITING ON THE JOB

T AUG 20 Introduction to the course and to each other
- Discussion: “Writing Effective Email Messages in the Workplace” (handout)

R AUG 22 Read before class, and also bring the book to class: Professional and Public Writing, Chapter 1, pages 1-11

F AUG 23 3 p.m. Deadline for sending Dr. Engles (tdengles@eiu.edu) the email described above on Page 3

T AUG 27 Professional and Public Writing, Second half of Chapter 1

R AUG 29 Professional and Public Writing, Chapter 2

F AUG 30 Email Assignment One due by 5 p.m.

T SEP 3 Professional and Public Writing, Chapter 3, 41-63; also, discussion of Paper 1 Guidelines – Writing and Your Future Career

R SEP 5 Writing Workshop: The Key Elements of a Solid Essay

T SEP 10 Writing Workshop: Using Outside Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism

R SEP 12 Writing Workshop: Five Simple Rules for Achieving Comma Glory

T SEP 17 In-class peer review of Paper 1: bring a printed rough draft of your paper to class

W SEP 18 Paper 1 due via email attachment to tdengles@eiu.edu by 5 p.m.
PUBLIC WRITING, PUBLIC SPEAKING: RACE, CLASS AND GENDER ON THE JOB


R SEP 26 Limbo, Introduction and Chapter 1; Email 2 due by 10 p.m. tonight

T OCT 1 Limbo, Chapter 6

R OCT 3 Working While Black, Preface, Introduction and Chapter 1; Discuss Paper 2 Guidelines; sign up for rough-draft conference

T OCT 8 Professional and Public Writing, Chapter 5, 155-76

R OCT 10 Working While Black, Chapter 3, pages 41-55 & Chapters 4 and 6; discuss Presentation Guidelines; sign-up for the date of your presentation

F OCT 11 Fall Break

T OCT 15 NO CLASS – Individual conferences on Paper Two: bring two printed copies of a rough draft of Paper 2 to your conference

R OCT 17 NO CLASS – Individual conferences on Paper Two: bring two printed copies of a rough draft of Paper 2 to your conference

T OCT 22 Writing Workshop: Passive Versus Active Voice; reading for today: Presentation Guidelines (the six-page handout that you received in class on October 10)

R OCT 24 Writing Workshop—Constructing Better Sentences; read before class: Line by Line, “Loose, Baggy Sentences” (Chapter 1)

F OCT 25 Paper 2 due via email attachment to tdengles@eiu.edu by 5 p.m.

T OCT 29 Presentations

R OCT 31 Presentations

T NOV 5 Presentations
R NOV 7 Presentations

WRITING TO GET A JOB


R NOV 14 Reading for today: Stewart and Dustin, “Exploring the Handshake in Employment Interviews”

T NOV 19 Writing Workshop—Constructing Better Sentences; read before class: Line by Line, “Faulty Connections” (Chapter 2)

R NOV 21 No Class – Work hard on your Final Project! Dr. Engles will be in his office during our class period, and during his regular office hours, to meet with any students who would like to discuss their projects.

NOVEMBER 25 – 29 THANKSGIVING BREAK!

T DEC 3 In-class peer review: bring printed drafts of your Final Project materials to class

R DEC 5 In-class Quiz: Grammar Lessons; Commas; Active and Passive Voice; Loose, Baggy Sentences; and Constructing Better Sentences
And finally... tearful, heartfelt farewells

F DEC 6 Project due to tdengles@eiu.edu by 5 p.m.

We will not meet during Final Exam Week
Writing Effective Email Messages in the Workplace

Adapted from Merlin Mann’s career-advice site, “43 Folders” (http://www.43folders.com/2005/09/writing_sensibl.html)

Emailing your friends and family and e-mailing those you work with should be two different worlds for you. If you want to be a good email citizen at work and ensure the kind of results you’re looking for, you’ll need to craft messages that are concise and easy to deal with. Many professionals come across unprofessionally when they write ineffective emails.

First: Understand why you’re writing

Before you type anything into a new message, have explicit answers for two questions:

1. Why am I writing this?
2. What exactly do I want the result of this message to be?

If you can’t succinctly state these answers, you might want to hold off on sending your message until you can. People get dozens, hundreds, even thousands of emails each day, so it’s only natural for them to gravitate toward the messages that are well thought-out and that clearly respect their time and attention. Careless emails invite neither careful responses nor respect for the person who writes them.

Think through your email from the recipient’s point of view. What exactly do you want from them? What do they want from you? If it’s a valuable message, treat it that way, and put in the time it takes to make your words count.

Get what you need

Although the possible topics and content of messages are theoretically endless, there are really just three basic types of professional email.

1. Providing information - “Larry Tate will be in the office Monday at 10.”
2. Requesting information - “Where did you put the ‘Larry Tate’ file?”
3. Requesting action - “Will you call Larry Tate’s admin to confirm our meeting on Monday?”

It should be clear to your recipient which type of email yours is; don’t bury the lede (as journalists put it). Whenever you can, get the details and context packed into that first sentence or two. Don’t be afraid to write an actual “topic sentence” that clarifies a) what this is about, and b) what response or action you require of the recipient. For example:

“Since the Larry Tate meeting on Monday has been moved from the Whale Room, could you please make sure the Fishbowl has been reserved and that the caterer has been notified of the location change? Please text me today by 5pm Pacific Time to verify.”
Professional email isn't the place to practice your stand-up act. Keep it pithy, and make that first sentence strong and clear, which is easily the best way to interest your recipient in the second sentence and beyond.

Write a great Subject line

You can make it even easier for your recipient to immediately understand why you've sent them an email and to quickly determine what kind of response or action it requires. Compose a great “Subject” line that hits the high points or summarizes the thrust of the message. Avoid “Hi,” “One more thing...,” or “FYI,” in favor of typing a short summary of the most important points in the message:

- Lunch resched to Friday @ 1pm
- Reminder: Monday is “MLK Day”—no classes
- REQ: Resend Larry Tate zip file?
- HELP: Can you defrag my C drive?
- Thanks for the new liver—works great!

Brevity is the soul of... getting a response

It's completely depressing to check your email at 4:55 in the afternoon to discover a gothic novel of a message waiting for you, spilling down your screen the distance of 2 or 3 scrolling pages. It's certainly not the kind of thing that excites the desire to engage and respond. I mean, just look at all that!

So, although I have only anecdotal evidence to prove this point, I'd wager that there's one visual trick most likely to improve your message’s success: **fit it onto one screen with no scrolling.** There’s a reason those web ads placed “above the fold” cost a lot more than the ones stuck down at the bottom; it’s the only part of the page that you’re virtually assured that anyone will see.

Whenever you can, try to distill your beautiful epistle down to just one or two points about a given topic, and then whittle that down to the point where there’s plenty of white space left underneath your closing. Got more to say? Put it in separate emails with—again—excellent Subject lines, and a descriptive, concise opener.

What’s the action here?

If your message includes any kind of request—whether for a meeting, a progress update, a pony ride, or what have you—**put that request near the top of the message and clearly state when you will need it.** Do not assume that your overwhelmed recipient will take the time to sift through a message in search of what you want them to do for you.
More good ideas

- **Make it easy to quote**—Other email users will quote and respond to specific sections or sentences of your message. They and others will appreciate it if you keep your paragraphs short, making them easy to slice and dice. If you have several different topics to include, put them in separate short paragraphs (even just one sentence long) that are separated by an extra space, instead of clumping them all together in one thick, coagulated paragraph.

- **Don’t chuck the ball**—Emails to a thread (a discussion consisting of several emails by coworkers on a specific topic) are like comments at a meeting; think of both like your time possessing the basketball. Don’t just chuck at the basket every chance you get. Hang back and watch for how you can be most useful. Minimize mere noise.

- **A reminder never hurts**—If you’re following up or responding to an email that’s more than a few days old, provide context right at the opening. For example, “You wrote in February asking to be notified when the new student desks will arrive; here’s a link to a site that tracks their shipping route.”

- **Never mix, never worry**—Unless your team really prefers to work that way, do not mix topics, projects, or domains of life in a given email. Inform everyone of Baby Tyler’s adorable antics in a different message than the one with the downsizing rumors and budget warnings.

- **Again, if you do mix, separate the topics**—Don’t bury two or three important points in one dense paragraph. Write like your recipient has a severe attention-deficit disorder. Thus: a few short paragraphs are way more effective than one long one made of the same sentences. Go through your finished email and hit Return twice whenever you spot a critical idea or request.

- **Proofread before sending**—Although e-mail is a looser form of communication with looser rules, *multiple spelling mistakes and grammatical errors do stand out*—read again just before sending and correct mistakes!

- **No “thanks”**—I’m not married to this one, but I know a lot of people who swear by it. In more informal settings and in high-volume mail environments, it’s not necessary to respond with a “Thanks” email whenever someone does what you asked. Save your gratitude for the next time you pass in the hall; a one-word “Thanks” email is unnecessary clutter in someone else’s busy day. On the other hand, don’t hesitate to thank someone for their time, and at somewhat more length, if they’ve truly done you a bigger favor.

- **RTFM**—If you’re asking for help, make sure you’ve exhausted all the documentation and non-human resources you have at your disposal. When you do ask for help, be sure to quickly cover the solutions you’ve already tried and what the results were.