

SPCOM 323: Speech Writing

Faculty of Arts, Department of Drama and Speech Communication, Winter 2014

Thursday: 6:00-8:50, ML-117

Professor Robert Danisch

Office Hours: Thursday: 9:30-10:30 and 1:00-3:00

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Course Description:

This is a class about the power of language, the ability of the written and spoken word to produce effects on audiences. We will be concerned with writing and speaking as a craft, the goal of which is to persuade an audience to believe or to act. As such we will explore a range of techniques that speechwriters use to craft persuasive messages. Weekly writing, reading, speaking, and lively discussion will help students to find a speechwriting voice of their own. In some ways, this is an advanced public speaking course, but it is also a course in learning how to write more effectively and in reflecting on theoretical questions about why and how language acts in the ways that it does. It is also a class about how to become more persuasive and impactful based on your ability to use language effectively. In other words, we will learn how to do things with words and language.

Course Objectives:

- To teach students to write in grammatically appropriate, stylistically interesting, and powerfully effective ways.
- To teach students the difference between writing a piece of discourse to be read and writing one to be heard.
- To help students find their own voice as writers and as creative intellectual contributors to public discourse.
- To improve students relationship with language, and subsequently to improve their ability to speak publicly in effective ways.
- To promote students' ability to think critically, clearly and analytically. This means understanding the ideas and concepts raised throughout the course, their origins, strengths, weaknesses, and their relationship to larger themes in this class, in your education, and in your view of the world.
- To improve students' abilities to read and listen critically, to respond reflectively and reasonably to others, and to distinguish successful and unsuccessful arguments.
- To gain a conceptual and practical understanding of the background, elements, processes, and contexts of persuasion and public speaking from psychological, sociological, and linguistic perspectives.

Course Policies and Procedures:

- *In the Classroom* – This class is a kind of laboratory experiment in working with words. There will be a mixture of lecture, discussion, and practice exercises. During some class periods, I will deliver a lecture on the topics outlined on the course schedule. However, that does not mean I expect you to be passive consumers. At times I will be asking you questions and I will expect you to ask me questions. In addition, I will ask you to provide examples of concepts we talk about in class, and so participation in lectures will be encouraged in a variety of ways. I expect this to be a lively class. Furthermore, every week we will be doing practice speaking exercises and you will be writing in response to questions that I pose. You will be expected to participate in several of these exercises during the semester. Also, please turn off all ringing electronic devices when entering the classroom. The sound of a cell phone (or any other device) is extremely distracting to your professor, and I assume to your fellow classmates, and it is rude and offensive.
- *Attendance* – Your presence in class is mandatory. However, I will not be taking attendance, and there will be no way for me to be absolutely certain that you are attending regularly. But you should be aware that the best way to do well in this course is to show up to every class, prepared and attentive. Inevitably, at the end of the semester, students who missed classes do poorly, while students who show up consistently do well. I do not post lecture notes on the Internet, nor do I respond to emails that say “what did we talk about in class on Thursday.” We cover lots of material in class and for that reason it is critical that you attend in order to do well. Attendance also means refraining from playing with your cell phone, reading the newspaper, surfing the internet, using other electronic devices or doing other coursework while in the classroom. If I notice you engaged in some activity that does not pertain to what is happening in the class, I will ask you to leave. This course is designed for courteous, motivated students who attend each class, do all the reading, and ask questions when they don’t understand something. If you miss class, you are responsible for getting materials we covered from a classmate. Students who fail to meet these basic and reasonable expectations can assume that their performance on assignments will suffer. In addition, 25% of your grade will come from in-class speaking exercises. You must be present to participate in these.
- *Academic Integrity* – I expect that the work you complete for this course will be your own, which is to say that cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any written assignment that borrows from other sources without giving proper credit or that is plagiarized in whole or in part from another source (including other student’s work) is grounds for an “F” on the assignment, or depending on the severity of the crime, is grounds for an “F” in the course.

University Policies on Academic Integrity:

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of

the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline,

<http://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-71>

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4,

<http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/student-grievances-faculty-guidelines/policy-70>

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals, <http://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-72>

Academic Integrity website (Arts):

http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html

Academic Integrity Office (University):

<http://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/>

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:

The AccessAbility Services (AS) Office, located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS Office at the beginning of each academic term.

Required Texts and Readings:

I like books - I like buying them, I like reading them, I like keeping them on my bookshelf, I like talking to people about them. Reading makes you smarter. You should read a lot. I wish I could assign a book a week, but that doesn't seem to be the culture anymore for undergraduate students. During the first class I will ask all of you to write down your email addresses, and afterwards I will construct a class list. What I'm going to do is email the class, each week, a set of pdfs of the following week's readings (or potentially a url link if there is an electronic resource). You should print the readings out or bring some electronic device to class that allows you to read them

off a screen. I expect students to access all readings regardless of their location. I will ensure that the readings are available at least one week prior to when we will discuss them in class. BUT. And this is a big BUT. If you are a fantastic student, super bright and eager you should really consider buying and the following books: Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*, Zinsser's *On Writing Well*, Fish's *How to Write a Sentence*, Corbett's *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, Booth's *The Craft of Research*, Graff's *They Say/I say*, Simmons's *The Story Factor*, Noonan's *On Speaking Well*, and Safire's *Lend Me Your Ears*. All of these books are on Amazon.com as paperbacks or used. You should buy them and read them, cover to cover. We will read sections from each but you should really read them all at some point if you are seriously interested in mastering the content of this class. If you buy the books, then just bring the books to class – you'll look smarter at least. In any case, I believe that reading a lot is good and so we will try to read a lot this semester.

Assignments:

- 1) **In-Class Speaking Exercises** – Each week we will be doing some practice in-class speaking exercises. You will be asked to participate in some of these but not all of them. By the end of the semester you will be expected to have participated in at least five exercises. Each time you participate in an exercise, I will give you a score from 1-10 based on your performance. Your highest five performances will be tallied for a score out of 50. I will multiply this number by 2 and you will receive a grade out of 100. These in-class exercises will be worth a total of 20% of your final grade. Obviously you need to be in class to do them.
- 2) **The Perfect Four** – Most of the papers I grade and the student writing that I read is poorly done because of sloppy writing. For this assignment, you will be asked to hand in a simple four page speech in response to a rhetorical situation that I give you. These four pages should be grammatically and stylistically perfect – no mistakes, clean and elegant prose. The focus here is less on the substance of your response to the rhetorical situation and more on your ability to write well. This assignment will be graded on a scale of 0-100 and worth a total of 20% of your final grade. This assignment will be due on January 30th.
- 3) **My Story** – For this assignment you will be asked to tell a story about who you are. Your story should be less than six pages in total, should display a kind of three dimensional truth, should draw your audience in, should produce a sense of identification, should be anchored to a key image or figure, and should advance a larger, implicit claim. This assignment will be graded on a scale of 0-100 and worth a total of 20% of your final grade. This assignment will be due on February 27th.
- 4) **The Argument** – For this assignment you will be asked to make an argument that supports an explicit claim. The argument will need to be supported by evidence and examples, and it will need to respond to potential criticisms or objections. This

assignment will be graded on a scale of 0-100 and worth a total of 20% of your final grade. This assignment will be due on March 20th.

- 5) **The Big Finish** – This should be interesting. During the last week of class, each student will be given 4-6 minutes. You can use the 4-6 minutes in any manner that you wish. Here is the only caveat. During the last week of class, each of you will bring in an index card. On the index card you will write somewhere between one word and three sentences. Those words will identify the effect that you hope to produce on your audience with your 4-6 minutes. I will hold the cards, and after your 4-6 minutes, I will ask the audience if you were able to produce the effect that you sought. You must use words to do this, **ONLY WORDS**. That means no pictures, no songs, no video images, just you and your voice. This assignment will be worth 20% of your final grade. Students can only receive an A if they are able to produce the effect that they describe on the card in greater than 50% of their audience.

Grades:

- *How are Grades Calculated?* - For each of the four assignments you will receive a score out of 100 points. Given that each assignment is worth 25% of your final grade, I will take the average of your four scores and that will be your grade for the semester. I do not like giving students numerical marks and I think it is an inferior system of grading. In my mind, I often think in terms of a letter grade. So that you know, your number out of 100 points translates into the following letter grades:

90-100 = A+	73-76 = B	60-62 = C-	0-50 = F
85-89 = A	70-72 = B-	57-59 = D+	
80-84 = A-	67-69 = C+	53-56 = D	
77-79 = B+	63-66 = C	50-52 = D-	

- *What do the Grades Mean?* – Loosely translated the letter grades mean the following: an A+ is truly outstanding and spectacular work that goes well above and beyond the normal expectations of an assignment and demonstrates a complete mastery of the subject matter. An A or an A- is excellent and exceptional work. A grade in the B range is good to very good work that demonstrates a solid grasp of the material. A grade in the C range is average work that demonstrates a satisfactory but incomplete grasp of the course material. A grade in the D range is unsatisfactory work of poor quality. And an F is failing work that does not meet the minimum requirements for the course. Because grades in the A range are exceptional and grades in the C range are average, A grades are rare and difficult to obtain. I'm telling you this so that you know that if you earn a 75 on an assignment it means that I think the assignment is good not excellent. If you earn a 95, it means it's one of the best pieces of work I've have ever seen for this kind of class.

- *Extensions* – There are no extensions for any assignment. Assignments are announced well in advance of due dates. If you know in advance that you cannot make a due date for an assignment, please discuss it with me beforehand. Requests for extensions after a due date has passed will only be granted in exceptional and unavoidable circumstances and must include (a) one typed, double-spaced page explaining the reason for missing the deadline, and (b) relevant documentation such as an official doctor’s note. The written request for an extension must be in my hands within one week after the scheduled due date. I am under no obligation to accept late assignments; assignments that are accepted may suffer a significant penalty (5 points for each day late).
- *Negotiations and Missed Assignments* - I do not haggle with students over grades, nor do I listen to declarations about why a student deserves an extra point here or there. You and I will not be negotiating your grade for the class – you will be earning a grade based on criteria that are explicitly stated in class. In addition, after the final grades are posted for the semester I will not re-mark or re-consider any grade from earlier in the semester. If you do not understand why you got a particular grade or why you lost points on a given assignment, you should come to my office hours or make an appointment to see me and I will explain your grade. If you do not participate in, or hand in, the final exam or either of the collaborative papers you will receive an F for the course.

Course Schedule:

Week #1 – January 9th -

“Introduction to Course – Warning! You Are Entering a Rhetorical Situation”

Week #2 – January 16th –

“Let’s Start Simple: Words, Sentences, and Paragraphs”

Readings:

William Zinsser, *On Writing Well* (HarperPerennial, 1998): pp. 3-48.

George Orwell, “Politics and the English language,” *A Collection of Essays* (Harvest Books, 1970): pp. 156-170.

Stanley Fish, *How to Write a Sentence* (Harper Collins, 2011): pp. 1-44.

Recommended: Strunk and White, *Elements of Style* (Longman, 1999), can be accessed online here: <http://www.bartleby.com/141/>

Week #3 – January 23rd –

“Structure Plus Style: Schemes and Tropes”

Readings:

Edward Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (Oxford University Press, 1999): 361-411.

Week #4 – January 30th –

“Pulling Your Audience In: Crafting and Using Narrative”

Readings:

Annette Simmons, *The Story Factor: Inspiration, Influence, and Persuasion Through the Art of Storytelling* (Basic Books, 2006): pp. 83-104.

John Truby, *The Anatomy of Story: 22 Steps to Becoming a Master Storyteller* (Faber & Faber, 2008): pp. 39-55.

Barack Obama, “Keynote Address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention.”

***The Perfect Four Assignment Due.

Week #5 – February 6th –

“Why Psychology Matters: the Emotions, the Audience, and the Speaker”

Readings:

Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee, *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* (Allyn & Bacon, 1999): 146-169.

Bill Clinton, “Address to Memphis Churchgoers” (1993).

Week #6 – February 13th –

“The Extra-Linguistic Factors: Bodies, Tone, Pitch, Rhythm, Sound”

Readings:

Kay Ryan, *The Best of It* (Grove Press, 2011): TBD

Listen to some Bruce Springsteen songs, preferably earlier Bruce, although later Bruce is quite good as well. If you can, watch some clips of him performing too.

*****No Class on February 20th – Winter Break*****

Week #7 – February 27th –

“Illustrating Your Point: Examples, Anecdotes, Quotations”

Readings:

Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee, *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* (Allyn & Bacon, 1999): 174-193.

***My Story Assignment Due.

Week #8 – March 6th –

“Justifying Your Claim: Using Reason and Evidence that Works”

Readings:

Wayne Booth, Gregory Colomb, and Joseph Williams, *The Craft of Research* (University of Chicago Press, 2008): pp. 108-170.

Week #9 – March 13th –

“Planting Objectors, Controlling Effects, and Dealing with Different Audiences”

Readings:

Gerald Graff, Cathy Birkenstein, and Russel Durst, *They Say/I say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing with Readings* (W.W. Norton, 2011).

Week #10 – March 20th –

“Imitation, Amplification, and the Progymnasmata”

Readings:

Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee, *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* (Allyn & Bacon, 1999): 290-319.

***The Argument Assignment Due.

Week #11 – March 27th –

“Some Final Notes on Style, Arrangement, and Delivery: When to Violate Expectations”

Readings:

TBD

Week #12 – April 3rd -

“The Big Finish: What Can You Do With Words?”

***No New Reading This Week.