

Advanced Writing

Pedagogical Principles

Goals and Principles

Our primary goal is to help students become independent as workplace writers by teaching them ways to discover and adapt to the features of complex writing situations and to contribute effectively within a team. To achieve this goal, we must also convince the technical and business majors who take our courses that effective writing will be necessary on the job. The core principles of the program, described below, not only help us achieve our primary goal but also help us engage our students in learning.

Active Learning and Meaningfulness

We seek to engage our students in meaningful writing projects in order to motivate them and to facilitate future transfer of skills to workplace situations or other courses. One way to make projects meaningful is to attach consequences to them that go beyond the classroom, and we believe it is important to involve students in service to our campus and community. We also believe students should help shape their projects and should discover through investigation, rather than simply be told, effective communication principles.

Relevance

As technical and business majors, our students are focused on their fields and future jobs. We strive to connect our courses to the workplace and the students' fields in order to motivate the students and prepare them for their careers. We also provide our faculty with opportunities to exchange ideas with industry through the Guest Speaker and Client-Based Programs, so we can continue to adapt and evolve.

Rhetorical Problem-Solving

We view writing as rhetorical problem-solving. We believe that technical and business students can apply the problem-solving habits of mind taught in their majors, combined with rhetorical skills we teach, to identify, analyze, and solve communication problems. We emphasize reader-centered communication.

Pedagogy

The following features reflect our goals and principles and constitute the core of our curriculum.

Project-Based

Within all technical writing course sections, and many business writing sections, all or most of the assignments relate to one project, which varies from section to section. The project may be client-based or may be developed by the students themselves, but it must address an actual need outside the classroom. This approach creates relevance and meaningfulness, while involving students in problem-solving within an actual, complex context. It also allows coverage of common genres without a prescriptive focus. Each assignment, such as research report or proposal, moves the students towards a successful deliverable for the project, thus helping students understand how genres function in the workplace and how they can be modified to fit various situations.

Collaborative

Students work in teams to complete course assignments. We incorporate collaboration training into the curriculum in order to help students learn to function effectively in teams. This approach reflects the prevalence of teams in the workplace and also encourages active learning and problem-solving.

Student-Centered

Our classrooms are student-centered—and team-centered. Students shape the project that forms the core of each class. The curriculum incorporates frequent workshops that allow teams to practice setting goals, following through, and seeking guidance when needed. The responsibility for structuring the workshops is increasingly turned over to the teams during the semester.

Supported by Technology

We have the benefit of a variety of technologically advanced classroom spaces. Nearly all of the AWP classrooms have a computer, with projection capability, for the teacher. Due to a university requirement, nearly all of our students also own laptops and may bring them to class. Sections with special emphasis on web or print document design may be taught in the English Department's Multimedia Teaching and Authoring Facility, a state-of-the-art lab. And the university's new Studio for Student Communication, a space designed to facilitate collaboration and professional presentation, is also available for classes. We use technology to support, not drive, our pedagogy, while helping students apply course principles to technologies, such as PowerPoint, that they will use regularly in the workplace.

Innovation and Coherence

We believe that strong programs must evolve to respond to changing circumstances and to remain at the forefront of new theories and research in the field. As a result, we encourage innovation. However, we also believe that strong programs must remain coherent and true to foundational pedagogical goals. Therefore, we pilot significant innovations while conducting intensive assessment. If an innovation furthers our pedagogical goals, we train faculty in its use and continue to assess the results as the innovation becomes part of our coherent program.