RWS 290 Business Writing & Rhetoric
Fall 2015

Professor Bob Stein                Office Location: SH-120A (Storm Hall)
bob.stein@yahoo.com                Hours: TTH 9:30-11:30 or by appointment

This syllabus is an informal contract. It outlines what is required of you and me, by default. Please sign the last page and return it to me by drop day, 9/4. Your signature indicates you’ve read and accept its contents. Failure to sign affects your class participation grade.

Course Description:

RWS 290 teaches you how to write in a business setting. It is a practical class in which you will produce several types of business documents used in the real world. It includes rhetorical and writing theory. You can’t produce effective documents without knowing theory. But our focus is on producing documents and not studying theory like in RWS 100/200.

My Teaching Priorities:

My priorities are integrated into everything we do, especially how I construct and grade assignments. The first four are analogous to the official Rhetoric Department outcomes listed later but are more exact. Number five is an attitude I bring to the classroom.

1. **The most important thing to learn is how to communicate to a business audience.** Business readers look for different things than academic readers in the texts they evaluate and read. We’ll draw those distinctions.

2. **Writing for a business audience integrates three skills:** You must: communicate in ways that put the needs of your audience ahead of your needs as the writer; conceive and layout your work in ways that fit with business practices; use a writing style that fits the business audience. This style is not like academic writing or student slang.

3. **Your work requires grappling with the rhetorical needs of the business audience.** Rhetoric is the art of persuasion. This class asks you to figure ways of persuading your reader to the ideas contained in your documents. This may be difficult at first because you have probably not been asked to do so before in school.

4. **Your work requires interpolating and presenting data.** You will write about qualitative and quantitative data in ways that show you can intelligently and concisely interpret and not just reiterate information. You will create and use charts that turn your ideas into easily understood displays, support points or solutions to a problem.

5. **You’ll learn about behavior in the business world.** When appropriate, I hold you to business standards, even though I know you’re a student. This is particularly true with deadlines, details and collaborative work projects. My intention is to elevate your understanding of the workplace you’ve chosen to pursue.
Required Texts:

*Business Communication*  
ISBN: 9780073403229  
Author: Rentz, Kathryn  
Publisher: McGraw-Hill Higher Education  
Edition: 3  
Publication Date: Jan. 1, 2014  
Status: required  
New Retail: $101.49  
Used Retail: $73.25  
New Rental: $66.00  
Used Rental: $44.70

*On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*  
ISBN: 9780060891541  
Author: Zinsser, William K.  
Publisher: HarperCollins Publishers  
Edition: 30  
Publication Date: May. 8, 2006  
Status: required  
New Retail: $15.99  
Used Retail: $11.55  
New Rental: $10.40  
Used Rental: $7.05

- **The Rentz book** is the foundation for the class. Students like that it helps them conceive and format documents and charts. The latest, 3rd edition is available at the bookstore. You can use the 2nd or 1st editions if you can find them. Desk copies of the 3rd edition will be in the library for those who do not wish to purchase the book.

- **The Zinsser book** is for one specific assignment. The most recent edition is available at the bookstore. You can use earlier editions if you can find them. There are no library desk copies for this book.

Grading:

This section will help you understand how I think about grades. My thoughts are in four parts: 1) Definitions of grades. 2) What I expect of you if we talk about grades. 3) The assignment/grade point system. And 4) Discussion of attendance and class participation.

1. **Definitions of grades:**

   **A** = Excellent work. An ”A” represents delivery of the assignment with no, or virtually no problems. The work demonstrates a mastery of all or virtually all elements of the assignment. It is equally excellent in addressing underlying tasks not stated in the rubric but expected nonetheless. These are: attention to detail, easy to understand, high-quality communication, virtually flawless analytical reasoning and critical thinking.

   **B** = Solid work. A “B” represents a strong understanding and delivery of the assignment. The work contains some flaws, omissions, incorrect elements or a less than thorough rendition of what is required. It’s clear the student grasps the assignment, but some things are missing. These are usually a lack of attention to detail and/or strong but not outstanding communication, analytical reasoning and critical thinking about the problem at hand.
C = Fair work. A “C” represents a less than solid understanding and delivery of the assignment. It contains several flaws, omissions, incorrect elements and a weak portrayal of what is required. The student may not fully grasp all aspects of the assignment, or may not be paying attention to the task. The work reflects fair reasoning, critical thinking and communication.

D = Poor work. A “D” represents work with little grasp of the assignment. It contains some correct elements but not enough to demonstrate mastery. The work is weak, if not disastrous, in terms of attention to detail, communication, analytical reasoning and critical thinking.

F = Unacceptable or no work. This grade is given for work that does not meet the assignment; general expectations for college-level work; or is not handed-in.

2. Comments related to grading:

A. “I worked really hard on this.” Sometimes students believe their work deserves more credit than is due solely because of how hard they worked. I don’t subscribe to this view. This means pleas for higher grades based solely on how hard you worked will fall on deaf ears. What can convince me is putting your work in the context of my priorities, grading definitions or assignment goals.

B. Excuses are excuses. Many of you will encounter bumps like a printer out of ink or scheduling conflict and ask me to reconsider your grade based on your trouble. You’re welcome to ask. But if you want to make an effective argument don’t give me an excuse. Make an argument in the context of my priorities, grade definitions or assignment goals.

C. “You didn’t tell us that in class.” I expect you to listen, interpret, consider and apply what you’re learning in class to all your work, whether I point it out or not, or include it in the assignment rubric or not. I’m always looking to see if you are learning the broader, deeper concepts associated with this class, especially when grading assignments. This means arguments over grades that rely on your ignorance don’t resonate with me.

D. “Tell me what to do and I’ll do it.” You can succeed in this class by adhering to this philosophy. The assignment rubrics tell you what to do. But you won’t reach the highest grades in this class without demonstrating an ability to think beyond what you’re told to do and taking the initiative that goes with it, especially with the long-form assignments.

When I ask students who get “A’s” in this class how they did it, they always tell me they used their work and not just school experience as a benchmark for preparing assignments. They did so because they understood the business nature of this class. They delivered what was asked for but conceived and executed it in ways as much about what bosses expect, as what teachers expect. This means anticipating what the boss wants; taking the initiative to solve the problem; showing a willingness to take charge; making decisions and taking risk.

E. “Can you look at my paper”? No I can’t, unless your question is accompanied by specific class-related questions regarding what you want me to look at and why. I also do not respond to this question via email at all, unless your question is very specific and easily
answered. I am, however, happy to spend as much time as you want reviewing your questions about your work with you in person.

3. Grading rubric:

Assignments are scored on a scale of 0-50 or 0-100. The following tables lists assignments, corresponding points and associated letter grades. Assignment grades are posted on Blackboard. You must notify me of discrepancies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resume Cover Letter</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resume</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good/Bad News Letters (2x)</td>
<td>100 (50/50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Charts</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process Chart</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Proposal</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation/Attendance</td>
<td>100 (50/50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Points</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Percentile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>88-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>84-87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>78-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>74-77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>68-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>64-67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Class attendance and participation grade:

Your grade is comprised of two parts: half comes from attendance and half from participation in class. One or both can make a difference in your final class grade.

A. Attendance:

I take attendance every class. Your grade is a math equation. Attend 85% of classes and you get an 85 for attendance. You are marked late if I’ve started class before you arrive. Three times late equals one absence. Each inappropriate in class use of an electronic device counts as an absence.

I don’t care why you don’t show or are late for class, unless some provable emergency leads to your being persistently absent or late and you are worried about its impact on your grade. Don’t bother me with emails, although I recognize good communication effects perceptions.
B. Participation:

I subjectively assign your participation grade when computing final grades at the end of the semester. My judgment is based on the impression you make in class but can extend to other education-based interactions like office meetings, email and hallway interaction. Your participation grade also includes a few simple assignments acknowledged with a “✓.”

I like a class that talks a lot when it’s time for discussion and hope everyone participates in discussion. You are never required to have a correct answer to participate, nor is there such a thing as a dumb question in my class. School is a place to take intellectual risks. Everyone is entitled to question, but you must also respect the opinions of others.

Some students talk more in class than others. But talk time is not the only determinant of participation, attention and engagement are too. Students who sleep in class, are chronically late, come to class stoned or drunk, or are playing on their electronics are being disrespectful to us all and signaling me they don’t care about class. This lack of care influences my perception of you. Conversely, students who are continuously involved in what is going on are persuasive regardless of how much or little they talk.

C. Late Work, No Work and Redo’s:

A. Late work: You are responsible for meeting the assigned deadline. I’m not interested in excuses. You can hand in work for credit up to one week after the assigned deadline. Late work is marked down by 1/3 of the grade you earn on the assignment. So if you earn a “B,” but your work is late, its final grade is a “B-.” Late work is unacceptable after one week, unless you are encountering some provably extraordinary experience making it impossible for you to meet the initial or late deadline.

B. No work: Not handing in work results in a zero. Zero points leave a big hole in your total and lead to a lower grade. So hand in something for every assignments even if your work stinks. Why? Some points are better than no points, and an “F” gives you a chance at a redo, meaning you can end-up with more points.

C. Redo’s: You can redo an assignment if you receive a “D” or “F.” You must declare your intent to redo within one week of receiving your assignment grade. You must hand in your redo within one week of declaring your intent. A redo grade is averaged with your first grade for a final grade. I provide direction for how to improve the grade of your redo.
Office Hours:

I am in my office during my office hours; however, I may arrive late or leave early for unforeseen reasons. Let me know when you intend to visit. It will save you time or frustration. You can also speak with me before or after class about setting up an appointment. I’m on campus at times other than my office hours or class.

Emails:

I only respond to emails that deserve a response. You should not expect an immediate response from me, plan on a 24 hour turnaround. I will not review your work via email unless I ask you to send it to me. See, “Can you look at my paper”?

Assignment Formats:

Formats are very important in business communications. Some of our assignments use assigned templates. Handwritten work is unacceptable unless deemed optional by me. All typed work is completed in Times Roman font, 12-point size for the body of your document, unless specified or deemed optional by me. Failure to use Times Roman affects your grade.

Reading Assignments:

Reading is assigned. It is more valuable for you to read the assignment before the class lecture.

Electronic Devices:

You are welcome to use laptops to take notes. Please turn off cell phones in class. Do not answer phones or leave class to answer a call. If there is an extraordinary reason why you must keep your phone on, discuss it with me at the start of class.

Class website:  http://blackboard.sdsu.edu

Students are expected to check BlackBoard for assignment and discussion materials. Students are informed of updates or changes in class activities through Blackboard-based email.

Standard of Conduct:

The classroom is first and foremost about learning and inquiry. Students are expected to treat each other and each other’s ideas with respect. A willingness to consider the ideas of others is essential to learning. Arrive prepared for class, just as you would for a meeting at work. Be ready to engage in our lecture and discussion. Your success in this class is your responsibility.
Students with Disabilities:

If you are a student with a disability and believe you need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. Contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible to avoid delay in the receipt of your accommodations. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services.

Turnitin:

(Integrated within Blackboard) may be used for assignments in some cases. When signing this syllabus you agree that papers are subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism, as well as for online evaluation, feedback and grading by the instructor, and peer review by fellow class members.

All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Students may submit their papers in such a way that no identifying information about them is included. You do not need to type your name on your documents, as your submission will be identified in the instructor’s assignment inbox automatically.

Another option is that a student may request, in writing, that his/her papers not be submitted to Turnitin.com. However, this option requires the student to provide documentation to substantiate that the papers are the original work of the student and do not include any plagiarized material.
RWS 290 Spring 2015 Classwork Schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Monday Date</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Book Chapter</th>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8/24</td>
<td>Orientation &amp; Networking</td>
<td></td>
<td>Syllabus Personal commercial</td>
<td>Plagiarism Quiz Business Card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>8/31</td>
<td>Business Audience Emails</td>
<td>1,2</td>
<td>Context, language and style of business writing</td>
<td>Email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9/7</td>
<td>Unit 1: Resume</td>
<td>4,7,11</td>
<td>Overview &amp; writing the resume for the job</td>
<td>Help Wanted Ad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>9/14</td>
<td>Resume</td>
<td></td>
<td>Writing &amp; designing the resume</td>
<td>Personal Profile Statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>9/21</td>
<td>Resume</td>
<td></td>
<td>Writing a cover letter</td>
<td>Resume &amp; Cover Letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>9/28</td>
<td>Unit 2: Good/Bad News</td>
<td>5,6</td>
<td>Good, bad and neutral letter formats</td>
<td>Bad News Letters (2x)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Letters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>10/5</td>
<td>Unit 3: Proposals/</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Overview &amp; Conceiving &amp; writing a recommendation</td>
<td>Secondary text: “On Writing Well”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>10/12</td>
<td>Proposals/ Recommendations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Organizing &amp; formatting a recommendation</td>
<td>Recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10/19</td>
<td>Unit 4: Reports Charts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Analyzing &amp; interpolating data into charts</td>
<td>Data and Process Charts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>10/26</td>
<td>Charts</td>
<td></td>
<td>Analyzing &amp; interpolating data into words</td>
<td>Writing Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>11/2</td>
<td>Group Work &amp; Report</td>
<td>8,9</td>
<td>Overview &amp; Group collaboration; Report project</td>
<td>Group selection; Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Research</td>
<td></td>
<td>management; Researching a report</td>
<td>contract; Secondary Research @</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>11/16</td>
<td>Report Proposal</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reviewing proposal with your boss</td>
<td>Proposal Approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>11/23</td>
<td>Reports</td>
<td>8,9</td>
<td>Group Work</td>
<td>Group Work on Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>11/30</td>
<td>Reports</td>
<td></td>
<td>Group Work</td>
<td>Group Work on Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>12/7</td>
<td>Reports</td>
<td></td>
<td>Group Work</td>
<td>Submit Group Report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Course Goals from the Department of Rhetoric:

To develop students into:

- Effective communicators who can understand how messages create meaning in a business setting.
- Critical thinkers able to problem solve in the production of documents.
- Young professionals able to analyze ethical issues as related to the production of communications material.
- Global citizens knowledgeable about the essentials of business as reflected through professional writing genres.

Learning Objectives from the Department of Rhetoric:

- Adapt basic communication model concepts to written messages and oral presentations through careful audience analysis and message planning.
- Understand how audience, purpose and context shape business messages.
- Effectively gather, interpret, and organize both secondary and primary information needed to support written and oral messages.
- Recognize and be able to analyze effective and ineffective written and visual academic and academic and workplace communication.
- Learn to use effective face-to-face and electronic strategies for collaborative work in preparing written, oral, and visual communication.
- Incorporate technology effectively in gathering, organizing, writing, and presenting written and oral messages.
- Master mechanically and grammatically conventional language in written documentation and oral presentations.

Ideal Outcomes from the Department of Rhetoric:

- Create a resume that makes an effective argument on your behalf.
- Choose words, write sentences, and develop paragraphs for good news, bad news, and persuasive messages that are clear, concise, complete, and accurate.
- Make a persuasive and substantial proposal.
- Gather and interpret primary and secondary information effectively for a report.
- Create and use graphics as evidence of points contained in your documents.
- Prepare short business documents such as memos, letters, e-mail, and reports.
- Prepare a substantial document using primary and secondary research and supported with suitable graphics.
- Learn to collaborate with colleagues.
Academic Dishonesty (Cheating or Plagiarism):

Cheating is behavior that undermines learning objectives. SDSU policy defines plagiarism as: the act of incorporating ideas, words, or specific substance of another, whether purchased, borrowed, or otherwise obtained, and submitting same to the university as one’s own work to fulfill academic requirements without giving credit to the appropriate source. Plagiarism shall include but not be limited to (a) submitting work, either in part or in whole, completed by another; (b) omitting footnotes for ideas, statements, facts, or conclusions that belong to another; (c) omitting quotation marks when quoting directly from another, whether it be a paragraph, sentence, or part thereof; (d) close and lengthy paraphrasing of the writings of another; (e) submitting another person’s artistic works, such as musical compositions, photographs, paintings, drawings, or sculptures; and (f) submitting as one’s own work papers purchased from research companies.

The SDSU library has a self-paced tutorial called “Plagiarism: The Crime of Intellectual Kidnapping” which is accessed at the following website:

http://infotutor.sdsu.edu/plagiarism/index.cfm

Please complete this tutorial with a grade of “C” or better and give me printed proof of your results along with your signed contract as requested below.

Our Contract:

This syllabus is an informal contract. It outlines what is required of you and me, by default. Please sign this page and return it to me. Your signature indicates you’ve read and accept the contents. Failure to return a signature affects your class participation grade.

Print Name: ______________________________________
Sign Name: ______________________________________
Date: ______________________________________