CSE/ISE300 Communications S12

- Time: Tue/Thur 5:20-6:40PM
- Location: Room E4315 Melville Library, 4th floor, east wing
- Required Book: The Elements of Style, 4th edition (Sep 1999), by Strunk & White, 978-0205313426, $10 new (or $5 bookstore rental)
- Recommended Text: Pocket Guide to Technical Communication, 5th ed. (2010), by Pfeiffer, 978-0135063965 $43 SBU new, $22 rent; $29 Amazon new
- Instructor: Professor Larry Wittie TA: Eric Papenhausen
- Office: CS Building, Room 1308 TA Help: 12-1:30pm Wed, 2110 cs
- Phone: 631-632-8750 (not 2-8456)
- Email: lw@ic.sunysb.edu
- Office Hours: 4-5pm + 7-7:30pm Tue/Thu or by appointment
- Course Homepage: http://www.cs.sunysb.edu/~lw/teaching/cse300

Graded quizzes and shoe papers back soon.
Printed draft due at start of next class, Thursday, 1 March.

Tu28feb12 Lect11Slide 1
Technical writing has a purpose: to get something done

The writer must convey knowledge to the reader(s)
“there’s a tendency to assume readers know more about the subject than they actually do.”, p. 2
Solution: technical writing must be well-organized

Readers: usually multiple readers with diverse needs

Nine steps to better technical writing follow.
Nine steps to better writing

1. Write a brief purpose statement
2. Consider readers' obstacles
3. Determine technical level of readers
4. Determine decision-making levels of readers
5. Find out what decision makers want
6. Collect and document information carefully
7. Write an outline
8. Write first draft quickly
9. Revise draft in stages
Write a Brief Purpose Statement

Why are you writing this? What is expected to be achieved?

Example: This report presents the findings of our fieldwork at Trinity Dam, along with our recommendation that the spillway be replaced.

Example: The purpose of this report is to compare and contrast two computer systems being considered for Greenway, Inc. The report draws conclusions about the system best suited for Greenway’s long-term needs.

Does NOT present summary points, conclusions, or recommendations.
Is NOT an abstract, a conclusion or a summary
Purpose is just to get you started, knowing where you are going
Consider Readers' Obstacles

a. They have interrupted life to read your writing
b. They are impatient
c. Their backgrounds and knowledge are not yours
   i. What are the readers’ technical backgrounds?
   ii. What do they want to know from you?
   iii. What do you want them to learn?
   iv. What aspects of a reader’s personality may affect the person’s reading?
v. Does the person have preferences about document style or organization?
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Pfeiffer, *PGTC5*, The Writing Process: Step 3

Determine Technical Level of Readers
(remember, you tend to overestimate it.)
Type 1: Managers
Need summaries, background information, and
definition of technical terms
Type 2: Experts
Need supporting details and references
Type 3: Operators
Need clear organization (to find what they want),
well-written procedures, and clarity
Type 4: General readers
Need definitions, graphics, statement of how
document affects them
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Pfeiffer, *PGTC5*, The Writing Process: Step 4

Determine the Decision-Making Levels of Readers

**Decision Makers:** busy persons who must decide

**Advisors:** people helping others make quick decisions

**Receivers:** people affected by the decisions, but not involved in making them.

How do you need to speak to each? What do they want?
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Pfeiffer, *PGTC5*, The Writing Process: Step 5

Find Out What Decision Makers Want
How?

A: Write down what you know about decision-makers

B: Talk with colleagues who have experience with the same readers

C: Remember that all readers prefer simplicity

KISS (Keep It Short and Simple)
Collect and Document Information Carefully

**RECORD** information collected carefully

Consider using index cards to collect research details

Each card contains:

- **a:** Source, where information came from
- **b:** The key information
- **c:** Whether it is a summary, paraphrase, or quotation
- **d:** Page or URL (Uniform Resource Locator) of the source.

How do you summarize, paraphrase? Why clearly label?

**TRANSFER** information to document carefully

Determine if "common knowledge"

Common knowledge need not be given a reference.

If quote, transfer "exactly": can introduce ellipsis (... leave out words).

Retain meaning (no quoting out of context, changing context by ellipsis)

If using summary or paraphrase, be sure to use your words and your sentence structure.

Read card to get the idea, look away, and write idea yourself.
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Pfeiffer, *PGTC5*, The Writing Process: Step 7

Write an Outline

Show organization and content in a brief summarized form
See if outline makes sense, covers what you wish, and flows well

To create:
1. Record "random" ideas quickly by "brainstorming"
   Idea "gathering" step. Include anything that might be related
2. Group ideas, showing relationships
   Add structure to all the ideas, how they relate, how they group
   Organization and filtering step. Some things left out.
3. Draft final outline from ideas and their relationships.
   Depth: must be complete enough to develop paper draft
   Balance: all main points have similar level of supporting detail
   Parallel: points in same group have same grammatical form
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Pfeiffer, *PGTC5*, The Writing Process: Step 8

Write First Draft Quickly
Schedule blocks of time (30-60 uninterrupted minutes)

Tips:
1. DO NOT stop to edit
   Just get your planned thoughts down

2. Do easiest sections first

3. Write abstract and summary last
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Pfeiffer, *PGTC5*, The Writing Process: Step 9

Revise Draft In Stages

A. Adjust and reorganize content
B. Edit for Style

- Shorten sentences
- Sentences should be direct and declarative
- Avoid overuse of subjunctive mood and future tenses
  - No "I think", "I believe", "X would", "X should", "X will"
- Avoid overuse of passive constructions (except for stress)
- Define technical terms,
- On first use of an acronym, give its expansion (e.g., URL)
- Add headings, lists, and graphics (images, tables, charts)
- Replace longer words with synonyms that are shorter, easier to understand, and not "flowery"
- Rewrite to eliminate repeated words or phrases in same or closely neighboring sentences or paragraphs
CSE/ISE 300
The Next Paper Is a Two-Page Memo2

Memo2 is an English essay due Thursday, 8 March 2012 as one printed copy in class & a .doc file emailed to lw@ic.sunysb.edu

Subject: 300 memo2  Why I Need a New Work Computer.

Put a title, your name and the paper’s last print date centered on a cover page for your “2.2-page” memo. Use 1.5 lines spacing.
Make memo lines 6 inches long with 30 lines per page of text. Make the text of your memo from 60 to 75 lines (2 to 2.5 pages, 850 to 1150 words). Address your boss politely. Number your pages.

Assume the reader is your computer-savvy, but non-expert boss in a company with 20 or fewer employees. The boss has announced that the firm will buy new computers for some employees, those most needing one for their jobs. Justify why the firm will benefit from buying you (or your team) new computer(s). Be specific on why you need a new machine, what computer model with what features, and what price from what source. After the 2.2 pages of memo text list all web and printed references used for your paper.
CSE/ISE 300

Two-Page Memo2: Paper & Email due 8 March

Write a technical essay in English on the topic:

Why I Need a New Work Computer

Explain why you need a new computer, what type, and how it will increase your value to the firm. (In doing so, let me know what is the business of your company, but in a way that will not bore your boss, who knows about the business, but not why you need a new machine for your own job.)

Describe the key features of the new computer and why they are critical. Tell what brand, model, cost, and vendor precisely. (List websites with these details in a References section at the end.)

Convince your boss to spend a little money.

(Cover page, salutation, and final References list do not count in the 2 to 2.5 pages. Just memo paragraphs count as text; feature lists, quoted material, and images do not.)