



## ESM 437-2: Writing Skills for Environmental Professionals

FALL 2017, WEDNESDAY 2:00-3:15 PM  
BREN HALL 1510

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Office Hours: by appointment

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to provide you the skills to write effectively across various academic and applied genres in the environmental sciences. A focus on writing mechanics and the principles of good scientific and analytical writing will help you de-clutter and streamline your work. The course covers two main writing styles: journalistic writing and academic or project proposal writing. However, other formats will be reviewed as well, such as: policy analyses, evaluations and data summaries, abstracts, and professional correspondence. You will also practice “two kinds of thinking” essential to effective writing: free-form and creative brainstorming, followed by critical assessment and revision of your work. Classes will include lectures, discussions, in-class activities, and peer review workshops.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To recognize and write effectively in various professional writing styles and formats.
2. To understand and apply the mechanics of good writing and the principles of effective scientific and technical writing.
3. To develop “research translation” writing skills essential to science-based professions.
4. To write well-argued, supported, concise, cohesive, and clearly organized analyses.
5. To strengthen critical thinking abilities, analytical reading and writing skills, and develop good collaborative work habits.

### REQUIREMENTS

- **TEXTBOOK:** Two books are required for this course: *The Elements of Style, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed.* by William Strunk & E.B. White, ISBN 978-0205309023 (~\$6), and *On Writing Well* by William Zinsser, ISBN 978-0060891541 (~\$10). I will provide all other readings as PDFs on GauchoSpace.
- **PARTICIPATION:** Writing well demands practice, so this course requires active participation—at home and in the classroom. You must come to class willing to write and think creatively and critically, and must be committed to writing at home each week to improve your craft. **Please bring a pen and paper to class each week, along with any required print-outs.**
- **ATTENDANCE:** You are expected to attend every lecture; I will circulate a sign-in sheet at the beginning of class. If you cannot make it to class due to an emergency or illness, **please notify me in advance.** Absences may also be excused for academic or professional activities, such as conferences or interviews, though all absences require make-up work. **If you miss three lectures or more, you will not pass the course.**

## GRADING & ASSIGNMENTS

GRADING: Even though this course is set up as Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U), your final grade will depend upon the accumulation of points. You will receive an “S” if you accumulate 80 points or more, and a “U” if you accrue less than 80 points. There is no final paper for this 2-unit course, though you will need to generate a “story idea” and a “proposal idea” based upon your interests. Late assignments will be marked down.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS. There are **10 short weekly assignments**, which add up to 100 points:

Assignment	Points	Due	How to Submit
Genre Analysis	10	Oct 11 @ 9am	GS + bring hardcopy
Science Summaries	10	Oct 18 @ 9am	GS + bring hardcopy
Draft Science Story	10	Oct 25 @ 2pm	GS + bring hardcopy
Mechanics Exercise	5	Nov 1 @ 9am	Submit on GS
Edited Science Story	10	Nov 8 @ 2pm	GS + bring hardcopy
FINAL SCIENCE STORY	15	Nov 15 @ 2pm	Submit on GS
Proposal Builder 1	5	Nov 20 @ 2pm (*Mon*)	GS + bring hardcopy
Proposal Builder 2	10	Nov 29 @ 2pm	GS + bring hardcopy
Proposal Builder 3	10	Dec 6 @ 2pm	GS + bring hardcopy
FINAL PROPOSAL	15	Dec 15 @ midnight	Submit on GS

Please use double spacing for your assignments, as it will be easier to provide comments.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Attempting all writing assignments is a course requirement. **A missed assignment will result in -25 points at the end of the quarter** to dissuade anyone who may have accrued enough points from skipping an assignment.

ASSIGNMENT FORMAT. Upload your assignments to Gauchospace as a **Word document** so I can comment using “track changes.” **Include a header** with your name, the assignment name, and date. **Save your assignments as “Lastname\_Firstname\_AssignmentName\_MMDDYY.docx”.** You will lose an automatic 5 points if your assignment is not in this format.

## TOPIC OUTLINE

Lecture	Topic	
1	Oct 4	Intro to Writing for Environmental Professionals
2	Oct 11	Genres of Environmental Writing
3	Oct 18	Science Translation I
4	Oct 25	Science Translation II
5	Nov 1	Writing Mechanics, Tone, & Style I
6	Nov 8	Writing Mechanics, Tone, & Style II
7	Nov 15	Argumentation
8	Nov 20	Academic & Proposal Writing I
9	Nov 29	Academic & Proposal Writing II
10	Dec 6	Peer Review & Evaluation

## LECTURES & READINGS\*

### 1. Intro to Writing for Environmental Professionals

OCTOBER 4

During this introductory session we will review the basic elements of good writing, begin a conversation about writing conventions across genres, and discuss idea generation.

- Readings due: None
- Assignments due: Please submit a writing sample to GS by Fri Oct 6 @ 12 noon

### 2. Genres of Environmental Writing

OCTOBER 11

Writing well means understanding your audience and the conventions of your genre. We will continue our discussion of genre and consider audience, purpose, strategy, and tone. Be prepared to share what you learned from your Genre Analysis with the class.

- Assignments due: Genre Analysis (Wed Oct 11 @ 9am on GS)
- Bring to class: Hardcopy of your Genre Analysis + be prepared to discuss in class
- Readings due:
  - Bunn, M. (2011) "How to Read Like a Writer" in *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, Volume 2*, <http://writingspaces.org/> 10 p.
  - Francis (2009) *Six Logical Writing Structures*, *Writer's Digest*. 2 p.
  - Lamott, A. (1995) "Short Assignments," "Shitty First Drafts," and "Someone to Read Your Assignments." In *Bird by Bird*, (pp. 16-27, 162-171). New York, NY: Anchor Books.

### 3. Science Translation I

OCTOBER 18

"Science translation" is the ability to understand and extract the most essential findings from a scientific study and present them in the most compelling way. Scientists and academics have the tendency to use complex language and phrasing, so we'll discuss how to distill dense scientific writing into succinct, jargon-free narratives. We will practice de-cluttering our writing, consider audience, and review basic approaches for writing to a lay audience.

- Assignments due: Science Summaries (Wed Oct 18 @ 9am on GS)
- Bring to class: Hardcopy of your Science Summary + be prepared to discuss in class
- Readings due:
  - Siegfried, T. (2006) "Reporting from Science Journals," In *A Field Guide for Science Writers*, (pp. 11-17), New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
  - Zinsser, W. (2006) Science and Technology. In *On Writing Well, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed.* (pp. 147-164). New York, NY: HarperCollins.
  - Blake, G. & Bly, R.W. (1993). Principles of Technical Communication and Words and Phrases Commonly Misused in Technical Writing. In *The Elements of Technical Writing*, (pp. 63-96). New York, NY: Longman.

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\* Readings and lecture content subject to revision as the quarter progresses. Keep checking GauchoSpace for the most up-to-date readings and assignment prompts.

## 4. Science Translation II

OCTOBER 25

We'll continue to practice "science translation skills" and engage in peer review.

- Assignments due: Draft Science Story (Wed Oct 25 @ 2pm on GS)
- Bring to class: Hardcopy of your Draft Science Story
- Readings due:
  - Yam, P.M. (2006) "Finding Story Ideas and Sources," In *A Field Guide for Science Writers*, (pp. 5-10), New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
  - Knudson, M. (2006) "Writing Well About Science: Techniques From Teachers of Science Writing," In *A Field Guide for Science Writers*, (pp. 26-33), New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
  - Revkin, A. (2006) "The Environment," In *A Field Guide for Science Writers*, (pp. 222-228), New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
  - Giles, C. (2014) "Talk to me! Top tips for conducting interviews with scientists," *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2014/apr/03/top-tips-conducting-interviews-scientists-science-writing-prize>

## 5. Mechanics, Tone, & Style I

NOVEMBER 1

Poor grammar and sentence structure impede clarity and readability—and diminish the power and effectiveness of your message. We will review common writing errors, practice good writing mechanics, and consider key principles to help you tighten-up your work.

Developing your voice as a writer also takes time, but there are simple ways to adjust your tone for different audiences. We will review punctuation, emphasis, word choice, and sentence structure as a means to adjust tone and style.

- Assignments due: Mechanics Exercise (Wed Nov 1 @ 9am on GS)
- Bring to class: Be prepared to share and discuss your edits in the Mechanics Exercise
- Readings due:
  - Clark, R.P. (2006). Cut Big, Then Small. In *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer*, (pp. 50-56). New York, NY: Little Brown & Company.
  - Strunk, W., & White, E.B. (1979) "Elementary Rules of Usage." In *The Elements of Style* (pp. 1-14). New York, NY: Pearson.
  - Zinsser, W. (2006) "Simplicity" and "Clutter." In *On Writing Well, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed.* (pp. 7-17). New York, NY: HarperCollins.

## 6. Mechanics, Tone, & Style II

NOVEMBER 8

We will continue to discuss grammar, sentence structure, and clarity; we will also peer review the Edited Science story.

- Assignments due: Edited Science Story (Wed Nov 8 @ 2pm; hardcopy only)
- Bring to class: Hardcopy of your Edited Science Story assignment
- Readings due:
  - Strunk, W., & White, E.B. (1979) "Elementary Rules of Composition." In *The Elements of Style* (pp. 15-33). New York, NY: Pearson.
  - Zinsser, W. (2006) Business Writing: Writing in Your Job. In *On Writing Well, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed.* (pp. 165-177). New York, NY: HarperCollins.

## 7. Argumentation

NOVEMBER 15

Academic and professional writing requires you to make a strong argument for your idea. We will review three important “moves” in crafting a strong argument, discuss how to organize and structure academic documents and proposals—including how to logically present evidence or support. We’ll also consider the importance of a thesis and introduction, and review research tips.

- Assignments due: Final Science Story (Wed Nov 15 @ 2pm on GS)
- Bring to class: Nothing! Just bring yourself.
- Readings due:
  - Creswell, J. W. (2003) Writing Strategies & Ethical Considerations. In *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.* (pp. 49-62). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
  - Creswell, J. W. (2003) The Introduction. In *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.* (pp. 73-85). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## 8. Academic & Proposal Writing I

NOVEMBER 20 (\*\*MONDAY\*\*)

As an environmental professional, you’ll need to translate data into a digestible narrative—whether in a research report or NGO white paper. We’ll discuss how to select evidence to build a case and how to present data to support findings. We’ll cover literature reviews, citations, and methods.

- Assignments due: Proposal Builder 1 (Mon Nov 20 @ 2pm on GS)
- Bring to class: Hardcopy of your Proposal Builder 1 + be prepared to discuss it
- Readings due:
  - Creswell, J. W. (2003) The Purpose Statement. In *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.* (pp. 87-103). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
  - Przeworski, A. & Salomon, F. (1995) The Art of Writing Proposals, *Social Science Research Council*, 8 pp.

## 9. Academic & Proposal Writing II

NOVEMBER 29

We will continue our discussion of academic and proposal writing, and hear your proposal ideas in a class pitch session. Be prepared to present and give feedback!

- Assignments due: Proposal Builder 2 (Wed Nov 29 @ 2pm on GS)
- Bring to class: Hardcopy of your Proposal Builder 2
- Readings due:
  - Creswell, J. W. (2003) Review of the Literature. In *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, & Mixed Methods Approaches, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.* (pp. 27-47). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## 10. Peer Review & Wrap-Up

DECEMBER 6

In our last session we’ll re-cap major concepts, revisit and reflect on the writing process and personal writing strategies, and do a final activity; you’ll also complete the course evaluation.

- Assignments due: Proposal Builder 3 (Wed Dec 6 @ 2pm on GS)
- Bring to class: Hardcopy of your Proposal Builder 3

- Readings due: None! Happy last day of class.

**FINAL PROPOSAL DUE FRI DEC 15 @ midnight on GS**

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

To avoid issues of academic integrity, always give proper credit to your sources. Here is the University's stance on Academic Integrity:

*All members of the academic community share responsibility for the academic integrity of students at UCSB. Academic dishonesty is an assault upon the basic integrity and meaning of a University. Cheating, plagiarism, and collusion in dishonest activities are serious acts which erode the University's educational and research roles and cheapen the learning experience as well as the value of one's degree. This is true for offenders as well as the entire community. It is expected that all UCSB students will support the ideal of academic integrity and that they will be responsible for the integrity of their work. Materials (written or otherwise) submitted to fulfill academic requirements must represent a student's own efforts unless otherwise permitted by an instructor. It is also the responsibility of each student to know the campus rules regarding academic misconduct—ignorance is not an excuse.*

- University of California, Santa Barbara, Office of Judicial Affairs (2015). Academic Integrity. Retrieved from: <https://judicialaffairs.sa.ucsb.edu/AcademicIntegrity.aspx>