

“If a piece of writing was going outside the Department – to the press, a consultant, for the website, or to the Mayor’s Office – [the Planning Director] always wanted to sit side-by-side in his office and go through the draft, line by line. He read for both tone and content, hunched over the draft, always with a red pen in hand.”

CRP 5850: Special Topics
Developing Writing Muscle in Planning
Fall 2017

Professor John Forester
111 West Sibley
Office Hrs: Tues. 2-5pm
(And by appointment)
jff1@cornell.edu

Introduction

This new special topics course will help planning students develop more efficient and productive writing strategies and techniques. These will be useful both immediately in the MRP program and later “on the job” professionally. We will concentrate on developing writing habits, approaches, techniques, skills and, as time allows, sensibilities and style as well. We will build from those foundational discussions and exercises to address forms of writing that planners often do at work: drafting briefing memos and executive summaries, writing jointly with colleagues, responding constructively to co-workers or other agency’s staff members’ writing, and writing editorials (“op-eds”), to take just a few examples.

Because this is not a course on research design, we assume that each student will work in parallel with his or her faculty committee and other specialists to master the research methods and research designs appropriate to that student’s field of study. In combination with research advice, our course should certainly help students produce and improve their exit projects (whether theses, client-oriented reports or research papers).

This syllabus is suggestive, not fixed once and for all. It provides a rough mapping of central challenges that we will address. It also provides starting points to help us to identify new issues and improvise as we surface new problems and explore practical writing strategies. We will organize our discussions in three major parts: (1) Your Writing, Your Reputation, and Your Audience; (2) Mechanics, Rituals and Strategies of Writing; and (3) Writing “on the job” in Planning (from papers and Exit Projects to memos, policy briefs, joint writing, and grant proposals).

Course Objectives and Learning Goals:

By the end of the course, students should have increased abilities to:

- Waste less time and write more efficiently;
- Subordinate “backgrounds” to effective introductions;
- Connect conclusions to introductory promises and questions via evidence and argument;
- Answer directly, “Who cares?” “Why should I trust you?” And “So what?”;
- Revise to eliminate wordiness and engage readers with crisp, clear and direct prose;
- Practice the simplest writing trick of all: reading aloud, letting our ears help our fingers;
- Develop habits to think with our fingers, drafting, rewriting and refining.
- Edit and collaboratively improve the writing of colleagues
- Frame policy briefs and draft media contributions like editorials (“op-eds”)

Note on Cornell Policy on Plagiarism: Plagiarism (presenting someone else's writing as your own, without acknowledgement) is theft. It provides grounds not just for failing any course in which it occurs but for dismissal from the university. Don't even think about it. (See: <https://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/principles2.cfm>)

Format: We will work more as a practical workshop than as an academic seminar. By writing, editing, rewriting and sharing our writing, we'll improve through practice. We will try to read a bit and to write a lot, discussing and exploring how to develop helpful habits along the way. Students should enroll for 2 credits, S/U, unless they wish to complete a particular project (for 3 credits).

Required Reading:

John Trimble, 2011. Writing with Style. Third Edition, Pearson Education.

Required Readings to be distributed (or posted on Blackboard):

Forester, John. 2008. "Policy Analysis as Critical Listening," in R. Goodin, M. Moran and M. Rein, Eds. Handbook of Policy Analysis. NY: Oxford.

Gaipa, Mark. "Breaking into the Conversation: How Students Can Acquire Authority for their Writing." Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture. 4.3 (2004): 419-437. (To be distributed)

Schubert, Janelle and Xavier Briggs. 1997. "A Primer on Preparing for Briefings." Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. (To be distributed)

Recommended readings:

Chrisinger, David. 2017. Public Policy Writing That Matters. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Forester, John. 2015. "Learning the Craft of Academic Writing," in E. Silva, P. Healey, N. Harris and P. Van den Brock, Eds. Routledge Handbook of Planning Research Methods. New York.

Lamott, Anne. 1995. Bird by Bird. NY: Anchor.

Princeton University Writing Program, Writing Center: "Introductions and Conclusions"

Smith, Catherine. 2016. Writing Public Policy. Fourth Edition. NY: Oxford.

Strunk, William and E. B. White, The Elements of Style [sentence level]

Williams, Joseph. 2013. Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace. Pearson.

Recommended Resources from University Writing Programs:

University of Michigan, Sweetland Center for Writing, Writing Guides:

Teaching Argumentation

How Do I Write an Intro, Conclusion, and Body Paragraph?

How Do I Incorporate Quotes into My Writing?

How Do I Decide What I Should Argue?

Handouts from Peer Writing Centers:

ICE: Introduce, Cite and Explain Your Evidence
Memo instructions (*check source)
University of North Carolina, "Descriptive/Reverse/After-the-Fact Outlines",
"Revising Drafts"
University of Wisconsin, Madison; The Writing Center: The Writer's Handbook
Writing Process and Structure (Creating an Argument, Working with Sources,
Drafting and Revising Your Paper, Finishing Your Paper)
Writing a Research Paper (Discovering, narrowing, and Focusing a Researchable
Topic; Finding, Selecting, and Reading Sources; Grouping, Sequencing
and Documenting Information; Writing an Outline and a Prospectus for
Yourself; Writing the Introduction; Writing the Body; Writing the
Conclusion; Revising the Final Draft)

Schedule of Meetings:

Part I. Your Writing is Your Signature : Your Writing, Your Reputation, and Your Audience

Week 1: Overview, Scope, Format

- Mon. 8/21: CRP Orientation, classes begin 8/23
- Wed. 8/23: Introduction to Challenges and Strategies of Writing in Planning
Writing Issues to address; unlearning and learning, rewriting

Week 2:

- Mon. 8/28. Reflective Writing: How Did You Come to This FIELD? What's it say about
you? How do your sensitivities/concerns/emotions point to aspects of
the topic? What's at stake for you?
- Wed. 8/30: Rationalist and Ethnographic Approaches to Problem-Framing Explored
What's the problem? How'd you come to your topic? Differences
between genealogy and abstract frame?

Week 3:

- Mon. 9/4: Labor Day Holiday, No Class
- Wed. 9/6: You will be identified with your writing, as w/ dress/speech:
How do you want to be recognized? How do you not want to be
identified (wordy, unclear, unprofessional...)?
J. Trimble, Chapter 1: Thinking Well, 2-11

Week 4:

- Mon. 9/11: When you correct or edit someone's writing, you're correcting THEM.
How do you want to be corrected/edited? What is helpful?
What is NOT helpful from another? So you should do what?

Read: Read: J. Trimble, Chapter 2: Getting Launched, 12-22

- Wed. 9/13: Getting Into the Conversation (MRP or PhD): Mark Gaipa's types of analysis and you; try it and see, compare styles and angles
Read: Mark Gaipa, "Breaking into the Conversation: How Students Can Acquire Authority for their Writing," Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture 4:419-437.

Part II: Getting it Written, Traps, Tips, Moves (Mechanics, Rituals, Strategies)

Week 5:

- Mon. 9/18: What motivates you? What blocks you? Strategies? Differences? What works for you? What helps? Getting it down, sharing it, rewriting; and metaphors we use to frame our writing: letter to a friend, address to a jury, panel of experts...
Read: J. Trimble, Chapter 3: Openers, 23-28
- Wed. 9/20: Traps 1: Issues of structure, excess, pointlessness, meandering VS promises, conclusions, structural consistency
How do we imagine structure(s)? Sketch front/back/fit; hunches?
What's necessary to demonstrate your hunches (staging of argument)
Read: J. Trimble, Chapter 4: Middles, 29-43

Week 6:

- Mon. 9/25: Structure of paper, structure of argument, persuasion, why/who listens?
Read: J. Trimble, Chapter 5: Closers, 44-47
- Wed. 9/27: Traps 2: What's an introduction, what's background, literature reviews? (Sweetland: "How Do I Write an intro, conclusion, and body paragraph?")

Week 7:

- Mon. 10/2: Do's and don'ts of literature reviews (guest?)
- Wed. 10/4: Traps 3: What's a conclusion/resolution, vs new material, new discussion. Options and strategies for conclusions
Read: J. Trimble, Chapter 6: Diction, 48-57

Week 8: NO CLASSES OCTOBER 9 and 11 [FALL BREAK, National ACSP Meeting]

Week 9:

- Mon. 10/16: **The promise of re-writing 1: "write shitty first drafts"**. (Drafting, beginning, starting out, ex1: strategies?). Timing!! Allowing time for rumination/SGV parallel processing vs. Internal criticism
Read: UNC: Revising Drafts,
Anne Lamott: "Write Shitty First Drafts" 21-27

- Wed. 10/18: Letting Our Ears Help Our Fingers: Reading Aloud and Speaking Directly ; Reading and listening, solo and with others.
Read: J. Trimble, Chapter 7: Readability, 58-75

Week 10:

- Mon. 10/23: Rewriting(2): Wordiness and pruning — overuse of is/will, verboseness, passives; ambiguity (“Do you mean ...?”) as obstacle and opportunity
Editing practice
Read: J. Trimble, Chapter 8: Superstitions, 76-87
- Wed. 10/25: Re-writing 2: Discovering implications, “Changing my outline”, seeing what else matters (word choices and directional choices; Synonyms as equals or alternatives...)
Audiences who help and those who don't help: pros and cons...
Read: J. Trimble, Chap 9: Critical Analysis: Jousting w/ Mencken, 88-100

Week 11:

- Mon. 10/30: Being part of the conversation (Revisiting Gaija's paper on angles of analysis)
Writing as conversation, argument, demonstration?
Read: J. Trimble, Chapter 10: Dramatizing Your Ideas, 101-116
- Wed. 11/1: Experiments with Reading Aloud 2: UNC handout on “Reading Aloud”: practice
Read: J. Trimble, Chapter 11: Revising, 117
J. Trimble, Chapter 12: Proofreading, 118-120

Part III: Anticipating Writing on the Job

Week 12: Review and Criticism

- Mon. 11/6: Editing a colleague's work, being a helpful editor, reviewer, “vs. critic”
Learning to review, edit, criticize, and encourage as well as write:
e.g: working in teams, collaborating, writing jointly, for better and worse
- Wed. 11/8: Writing in teams: Challenges, Issues, Practice (Self-Organized: JF in 5130)
What's helpful? Strategies/Diplomacy/Showing vs Blaming?

Week 13:

- Mon. 11/13: Briefings: Shubert, J. & X. Briggs, 1997. “A Primer on Preparing for Briefings” (18 pp) Cambridge: Harvard Kennedy School of Government.
UNC Policy Briefs, writing testimony, speeches for pols, board members

Wed. 11/15: Grant Writing 1 (Guest: Paul Mazarella, Director, Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services)

Week 14:

Mon. 11/20: Grant writing 2

Wed. 11/22: NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY)

Week 15:

Mon. 11/27: Op-Eds and Writing for Media (Guest: Tom Campanella)
Read: David Jarmul, "How to Write an Op-Ed Article," Duke University's Office of News and Communications, November 2013;
Trish Hall, "Op-Ed and You," The New York Times, Oct 13, 2013; and
Jeffrey Seglin, "How to Write an Op-Ed or Column," Harvard Kennedy School, John F. Kennedy School of Government, August 2012

Wed. 11/29 Review and Evaluation