**Effective Writing for Business and the Professions**  
**Autumn 2017**  
September 27 through November 15 (Wednesdays), 5:30-8:00 PM

<table>
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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>September 27</td>
<td>5:30 – 7:55</td>
<td><strong>Lecture 1</strong>: Characters and actions. <em>(Presenter: Tracy Weiner)</em></td>
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| October 4   |              | **To prepare**: (1) Do the exercises on the last three pages of the Lecture 1 Worksheet.  
              |              | 5:30 - 6:20: **Seminar** on the exercises.  
              |              | 6:30 - 7:55: **Lecture 2**: Clear sentences and long sentences *(Presenter: Tracy Weiner)* |                            |
| October 6   |              | **WRITING SAMPLE 1 DUE by email to your seminar group by 5PM Friday, October 6.** |                            |
| October 11  |              | **To prepare**: bring in the writing samples you received from your group on October 5. Review them for characters, actions, nominalizations, and connectors. Bring in copies of all the samples, either on paper or as files on your tablet or computer.  
              |              | 5:30 - 6:20: **Seminar** on sample 1  
              |              | 6:30 - 7:55: **Lecture 3**: Managing complex information *(Presenter: Linda Smith)* |                            |
| October 18  |              | **To prepare**, bring in the writing samples you received on October 5. Review them for core violations, connectors, and information flow. Bring in copies of all the samples.  
              |              | 5:30 - 6:20: **Seminar** on sample 1  
              |              | 6:30 - 7:55: **Lecture 4**: Introductions *(Presenter: Tracy Weiner)* |                            |
| October 25  |              | **To prepare**: (No seminar this week.) |                            |
| October 27  |              | **WRITING SAMPLE 2 DUE by email to your seminar group by 5PM Fri October 27.** |                            |
| November 1  |              | **To prepare**: bring in the writing samples you received on October 27. Review them for motivation and point.  
              |              | 5:30 - 6:20: **Seminar** on sample 2  
              |              | 6:30 - 7:55: **Lecture 6**: Structuring your text—II *(Presenter: Linda Smith)* |                            |
| November 8  |              | **To prepare**: review and bring in the writing samples you received on October 27. Review them for motivation, point, and theme.  
              |              | 5:30 - 6:20: **Seminar** on sample 2  
              |              | 6:30 - 7:55 **Lecture 7**: Argument *(Presenter: Tracy Weiner)* |                            |
| November 15 |              | (No seminar this week.)  
              |              | 5:30-7:55 **Lecture 8**: Argument II, and Writing Triage. *(Presenter: Tracy Weiner)* |                            |
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Effective Writing: course description and goals

When it comes to communication, busy professionals face a dilemma: the more you know, the more difficult it can be to communicate what you know clearly and persuasively. As a professional, you acquire expertise in your field, but that expertise can't do much good -- for you or for anyone else -- when it's just sitting in your head. To share it with others, you need to organize your material, structure your ideas, and frame your concepts in language that is both precise enough to be accurate and direct enough to be clear. And you need to do all of this fast.

Effective Writing in Business and the Professions demonstrates the structures of clear professional prose. You will learn not only how to diagnose and fix trouble spots that can make writing unclear, but also how to refocus a text to reach different audiences, such as colleagues, clients, or the general public.

How can you tailor your work to particular readers while working quickly enough to be effective? Our course tackles this problem by using a "reader based" approach to writing: you will learn to predict how readers will respond to language when it is structured in particular ways. Before your readers can process the information you wish to communicate, they need to see certain predictable kinds of sentence structures, paragraph structures, and text structures.

In our first three sessions, we disentangle convoluted sentences taken from real-world professional prose. We work to undo the damage done by sentences that leave readers with no clue about who is doing what to whom -- a common problem in professional writing. In the next two sessions, we focus on how to make clear points within paragraphs: how to identify the most crucial piece of information readers need within a paragraph, and how to position this information so that different readers will be able to find it immediately, before they start wondering what the paragraph is supposed to be about. Finally, in the last three sessions, we work on how writers may use the introductions of texts not only to create a sense of coherence, but to motive readers -- even readers who might initially be apathetic or resistant to the text.

Effective Writing's course structure and workload

The course includes lecture sessions and small seminar groups in which instructors can focus on each student's writing needs. In the lecture sessions, we'll examine real-world professional prose taken from a wide variety of fields, and discuss why the good ones work and why the bad ones -- and some of them are very bad indeed -- don't work at all. The principles of clear writing that you study, then, won't be presented as a list of abstract rules; instead, they will be developed from the class's experience of good and bad writing.

In the seminar groups, which are led by members of the Writing Program staff, you'll exchange copies of your writing samples with other students and discuss these samples as a group. This kind of a seminar can give you a very clear idea of how a group of diverse readers responds to your work. We'll also do some exercises that will help you incorporate the courses' principles into your daily writing habits.
Turning in your writing samples: Over the course of the class, you'll turn in two writing samples and distribute them by email to your seminar group. For this purpose it's important that we have an email address for you that a) you check reasonable frequently, and b) you are comfortable sharing with other members of the seminar group. You'll receive more precise directions about turning in your writing samples from your seminar leader, who will contact you by email once we've assigned everyone to a seminar.

What kind of sample should you turn in? The sample should be a one to three page example of your work-related writing. We strongly recommend that you turn in the sort of writing that you have to do frequently, so you can apply the feedback you get in your seminar to many other documents you write. If most of the documents you write are longer than three pages, please select a section from a longer document.

If you have confidentiality concerns for your document, then prior to submitting it you should replace, for example, client names with pseudonyms such as "Jane Doe" or "Bugs Bunny," or product names with "Acme virtual ewidgets."

Certificates of attendance: The Graham School will issue Certificates of Attendance to those who attend at least 6 of the course's 8 sessions. For this purpose, we keep an attendance sheet. If you would like to receive a Certificate, please remember to record your attendance on the sheet.

Lecture handouts: There is no required text for this course, but you will receive materials at each plenary session. By the end of the course you'll have a 200 page writing manual. If you wish, we can make the handouts available to you as (non-editable) pdf files.

Recommended books and web sites:

Again, there are no required textbooks for this course; we provide you with one through the weekly lecture handouts. If you're curious, however, there are many useful books about writing available. Many people, for example, ask us about Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*, which is much-loved and widely recommended. (You can buy it at your favorite bookstore, on or off line).

Should you buy it? We're torn. The book is beautifully written, and many people find it to be both compelling and inspiring. But some of its advice can seem a little subjective and hard to pin down. Strunk and White are on the side of the angels, certainly, when they advise writers to be clear, but what exactly does being clear mean? By all means get Strunk and White for inspiration. For execution, you may need to go beyond them. This course originated at the University of Chicago as an attempt to specify exactly how writers can make their sentences seem to readers more persuasive, more valuable, and more clear.

We may be prejudiced, but we're fond of two books by the late Joseph M. Williams. (Full disclosure: we are prejudiced in their favor, in part because Joe Williams founded the University of Chicago Writing Program and taught us most of what we know.) At the on-line bookstore of your choice, you'll find his *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, as well as his *The Craft of Research* (written with Wayne C. Booth and Gregory G. Colomb). Taken together, these books are pretty hefty, but they'll go into very great depth about many topics we cover.
What about grammar? Some advice, and a word on why adhering to grammatical rules is not the most important part of your writing

For simple information about grammar and usage, there's a wealth of information available on-line for free. We maintain a list of such sites at http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/resources/grammar.htm. For an entertaining guide to grammar in book form, try Karen Elizabeth Gordon's The Deluxe Transitive Vampire: the Ultimate Handbook of Grammar for the Innocent, the Eager, and the Doomed. This book has the tremendous advantage of being funny, making it more likely that you'll read and use it.

We don't mean to suggest that only one grammar book can fill your needs. There are many accurate guides available, and frankly we suggest that you let price and readability be your guides. There is, however, one trap to watch out for: make sure you find a book written for use in the country where your intended audience lives. There are some differences between British and American rules of punctuation, usage, and spelling.

British: "Harry", Hermione said, "you must have found that jumper lying on the pavement".
American: "Harry," Hermione said, "you must have found that sweater lying on the sidewalk."

Both examples are considered correct in their respective countries -- a point that's worth remembering, not just when you're choosing a grammar book. Grammar is arbitrary. Its rules are decided by agreement among speakers and writers. They differ from country to country, and over time. If you've been told that you need to polish your grammar, remember that it's not a moral failing.

While grammatical correctness is a virtue, it's not the most important virtue you can have as a writer. Grammatical correctness is not the same as effective communication. A grammatically correct sentence can be too densely complicated for readers to understand. It can be too little focused on their interests for them to find it valuable or persuasive. For effective communication, you need to understand not just a set of arbitrary rules, but some principles of how readers process information, and how readers decide whether information is important to them. That's what we teach in this course.