

Spring 2020
Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics (AAE)
University of Wisconsin-Madison
AAE 721: Professional Communication of Applied Economic Analysis

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Credits: One credit

Canvas Course URL: <https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/191011>

Meeting Times and Location:

Most of the course is taught online. Groups of 3-4 students will meet in person periodically to discuss drafts of their writing assignments with their peers. Attending these peer-edit sessions is mandatory and the TA will take attendance. Students will have time after each meeting to rewrite their drafts before submitting them for grading.

The peer-edit meetings (~50 min) will take place on the following **Mondays, between 11 and 1pm:**

| | |
|---------|-------------------|
| Feb 10: | room 103 |
| Feb 17: | room 103 |
| Mar 2: | rooms 113 and 215 |
| Mar 23: | room 103 |
| Apr 6: | room 103 |
| Apr 20: | room 103 |

All rooms are reserved from 11 to 1pm. I will form six groups of 3-4 students when I distribute writing assignment instructions. Initially, three of these groups will meet from 11-12 and the other three from 12-1pm. Later in the semester, all groups may meet at the same time. If students are unable to meet at the planned time, they are responsible for rescheduling and informing the instructor and TA.

Instructional Mode: Self-directed learning with online material; one-on-one instructor tutorials during virtual office hours or by appointment.

The course meets the one-credit standard by an expectation of 45 hours of student engagement with the course learning activities, which include scheduled instructor/student meeting times, reading, writing, preparing for and completing quizzes and assignments, and other work as described in this syllabus.

Instructor and TA Availability:

| | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Instructor (virtual office hours): | Wed 9-10am; Thurs 8:15-9:15am |
| TA (in-person office hours): | Tu 4-5pm (room 319 Taylor Hall) |

Course Description:

Professional communication is critical for a successful career as an economist. The course will focus on four central ideas for writing about technical subjects: general elements of good writing; readable (reader-friendly) writing; writing for different audiences; and summarizing complex topics and analyses.

Reading material in Canvas will introduce these ideas. Two quizzes about this material and six writing assignments are designed to reinforce the main concepts; practice writing and rewriting skills; and learn to incorporate editorial feedback. All writing assignments involve synthesizing and summarizing complex topics at variable levels of detail, for technical and non-technical audiences. The plan is to coordinate the last two writing assignments with econometric analyses from AAE 772.

Audiences the students may encounter in their future jobs include peer economists; scientists in fields outside economics; managers, clients, consultants and policymakers with variable technical or non-technical backgrounds; journalists; and the general public. Students will regularly use an online tool (readable.com) to calculate readability scores for different audiences. They will practice achieving a target readability score within a word count limit.

Requisites, Basic Writing Skills:

AAE 772 (Applied Econometrics II, 4 credits) is the only concurrent required class for students in the Resource and Energy Demand Analysis (REDA) program, Visiting International Student Program (VISP) and Master of Science/Professional Option (MSPO) program. Outside of AAE 772 and AAE 721, each program has unique additional requirements for the spring semester.

As noted during the fall 2019 orientation session, AAE 721 is not designed to teach basic English writing skills. I may return *ungraded* any writing that I cannot evaluate for content, structure and logical flow due to insufficient basic skills. If online tools designed to improve writing quality prove insufficient, students should independently seek out other resources to boost their basic skills.

Some resources for English as a Second Language (ESL) students were described in fall 2019. Local small-group or one-on-one tutoring opportunities include the [UW Writing Center](#) and the Wisconsin ESL Institute ([WESLI](#)), which offers free assessment tests to target tutoring sessions toward current skills. Jennifer Phillips from WESLI (jennifer@wesli.com) has visited the AAE department and can provide more information.

I don't recommend using Google Translate to turn your native language into an English-language draft. If you choose this strategy, please edit the result multiple times to produce a polished version for peer edits and grading. The online tools readable.com (see *Required Textbooks and Software* below) and grammarly.com may help you reach that goal but may not be sufficient.

Course Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, students will:

- Recognize elements of reader-friendly writing and be able to use them in their own professional writing (executive summary, client memos, analysis reports etc.);
- Know how to communicate with different target audiences;

- Be able to summarize data analyses with different econometric models and explain their results to experts and non-experts;
- Be able to place their own or others' analysis results into a larger context.

Grading:

Six writing assignments: 75%

Two quizzes: 5%

Participation in peer edit sessions and one-on-one instructor tutorials: 20%

Your ability to incorporate editorial feedback at the rewriting stage is an important part of the evaluation. There are **no midterm or final exams**.

I will determine your final course grade based on the percentages below, which arise from numerical scores I will assign to each assessment element. Final grades are not curved.

| | |
|---------------|----|
| ≥ 93% | A |
| < 93% & ≥ 88% | AB |
| < 88% & ≥ 83% | B |
| < 83% & ≥ 78% | BC |
| < 78% & ≥ 70% | C |
| < 70% & ≥ 60% | D |
| < 59% | F |

Canvas provides instructor tools for detecting plagiarism (copying sentences or larger chunks of text from another writer and representing them as yours). Plagiarism may result in an F for the assignment. Please submit original writing only.

Required Textbooks and Software:

No textbooks are required. You need to purchase a monthly subscription to readable.com (\$4/month). Maintaining or canceling the subscription at the end of class is your own choice. Click [here](#) for a 20% educational discount (\$3.20/month).

Recommended references:

Zinsser, William (1976). *On Writing Well*. Free 30th anniversary edition (2006):

<http://richardcolby.net/writ2000/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/On-Writing-Well-30th-Anniversa-Zinsser-William.pdf>

McCloskey, Deirdre N. (2019). *Economical Writing* (3rd edition).

<https://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/E/bo25674588.html> (\$14)

Recommended grammar/style training:

- <https://www.poynter.org/shop/self-directed-course/cleaning-your-copy/> (free)
- <https://www.poynter.org/shop/self-directed-course/language-primer/> (\$20)
- Grammar training and quiz, courtesy of UW-Madison School of Journalism (free): <https://202.journalism.wisc.edu/training-2-2/> (click on Grammar Training). Feel free to review

the Style Training as well, keeping in mind that it's designed for journalism students who typically own the Associated Press (AP) Style Handbook.

Regular reading helps everybody become a better writer. For this class, I recommend reading news about economics, energy and environmental topics. The UW library provides access to many newspapers and magazines, including *The Economist*, the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post* etc. More information: <https://researchguides.library.wisc.edu/newspapers>

Software: For AAE 721, students will primarily use MS-Word and Canvas. AAE 772 typically uses R or R Markdown. For some assignments, students will need to simplify and reformat tables generated with other software (MS-Excel, Stata, R etc.) in MS-Word.

Writing assignments, Instructor Tutorials:

I will provide word count limits and target readability scores for all assignments. An important part of learning how to summarize complex material is to stay within the word count limit. This may seem daunting initially but will become easier over time. Your first draft will often be longer, and you will shorten it, sometimes substantially, during the rewriting stage.

Feedback on your writing is one of the most important aspects of this course and will take several forms. To receive feedback from your fellow students, please **email a first draft of each assignment to your group members by 7:00pm, on the Sunday before the peer-edit session**. If you choose to send your draft later, it will limit their ability to provide helpful feedback.

The final version for grading is due in Canvas a few days after the peer edit session, as noted on the schedule below. All submitted writing assignments must have 1-inch margins and use a standard 11- or 12-point font (e.g., Arial, Calibri, Times New Roman). The last two assignments should include 1-2 tables or figures.

I will return each graded assignment with written comments. Next steps include an *optional* rewrite and *mandatory* participation in one-on-one tutorials about **at least two** of the six assignments.

Optional rewrites: In addition to the rewriting between peer edits and Canvas submission, you may revise up to two assignments *after* receiving a grade, by responding to my written feedback. I will not grade the rewritten versions but will note any improvements and take them into account at final grade time. The deadline for optional rewrites is *one week* after receiving the graded assignment.

Instructor Tutorials: Over the course of the semester, each student will spend 40-60 minutes in one-on-one instructor tutorials (audio call during virtual office hours or at other scheduled times). Tutorials may take 10-15 minutes per assignment for 3-5 assignments, or correspondingly longer for fewer assignments (minimum 2).

I will make suggestions for the timing and number of tutorials after I have completed at least one round of grading. We will schedule tutorials via email or Doodle. I will keep track of each student's total tutorial time and will send a brief evaluation via email, using the rubric below. No-shows for a scheduled tutorial receive zero points.

Sample Tutorial Evaluation Rubric:

Date of tutorial: _____ Score: _____ out of 15

Assignment: _____

_____ out of 3: Ease of scheduling tutorial, being on time.

_____ out of 6: Being prepared. Draft has been rewritten several times, with few grammar and spelling errors; word count and readability score are close to target.

_____ out of 6: Quality of discussion. If applicable: ability to improve an earlier version by incorporating editorial feedback.

Deadlines:

Deadlines are final. Missing a deadline for a quiz or assignment will lower your grade.

Academic Integrity:

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison's community of scholars in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review. <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/>

Rules, Rights and Responsibilities:

<https://guide.wisc.edu/undergraduate/#rulesrightsandresponsibilitiestext>

Academic Calendar and Religious Observances:

<https://secfac.wisc.edu/academic-calendar/#religious-observances>

Accommodations of Students with Disabilities:***McBurney Disability Resource Center syllabus statement***

"The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA."

<http://mcburney.wisc.edu/facstaffother/faculty/syllabus.php>

Diversity and Inclusion:***Institutional statement on diversity***

"Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world." <https://diversity.wisc.edu/>

Schedule

| Week | Date | Topic and/or Activity |
|--------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Week 1 | Jan 21 | Introduction. |
| Week 2 | Jan 27 | Read: Selected chapters of <i>On Writing Well</i> (William Zinsser) Quiz 1 (about week 1 reading assignment). |
| Week 3 | Feb 3 | Read: Introduction to readable writing; examples for different audiences: press release vs. peer-reviewed paper Quiz 2 (about week 2 reading assignment). |
| Week 4 | <i>Feb 10</i> | Read: Online material about 2019 Nobel Prize in Economics. Assignment 1: Summary of economics paper, with larger context <i>Peer edits of Ass. 1.</i> |
| Week 5 | Feb 14 <i>Feb 17</i> | Read: More on writing for different audiences Assignment 2: Writing for different audiences Ass. 1 due in Canvas <i>Peer edits of Ass. 2. Instructor tutorials.</i> |
| Week 6 | Feb 21 Feb 24 | Read: What makes writing good? Annotated storygrams from <i>The Open Notebook</i> . Ass. 2 due in Canvas Assignment 3: Summary of representative economics paper. Instructor tutorials. |
| Week 7 | <i>Mar 2</i> Mar 7 | <i>Peer edits of Ass. 3. Instructor tutorials.</i> Ass. 3 due in Canvas |
| Week 8 | Mar 9 | Assignment 4: Writing for different audiences (continued). Instructor tutorials |
| Spring break | Mar 16 | |
| Week 9 | <i>Mar 23</i> Mar 27 | <i>Peer edits of Ass. 4. Instructor tutorials.</i> Ass. 4 due in Canvas |
| Week 10 | Mar 30 | Read: Guidelines for tables and figures; elements of client memo Assignment 5: Summary of AAE 772 analysis. Instructor tutorials. |
| Week 11 | <i>Apr 6</i> | <i>Peer edits of Ass. 5. Instructor tutorials.</i> |
| Week 12 | Apr 13 | Assignment 6: Summary of AAE 772 analysis (continued). Instructor tutorials. |
| Week 13 | Apr 17 <i>Apr 20</i> | Ass. 5 due in Canvas <i>Peer edits of Ass. 6. Instructor tutorials.</i> |
| Week 14 | Apr 27 | Instructor tutorials. |
| Week 15 | May 1 May 4 | Ass. 6 due in Canvas Final exam week (no exam for this course) |