

Spring 2021
Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics (AAE)
University of Wisconsin-Madison
AAE 721: Professional Communication of Applied Economic Analysis

Instructor: Silke Schmidt, PhD. silke.schmidt@wisc.edu

Credits: One credit

Canvas Course URL: <https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/243762>

Meeting Times and Location:

Most of the course is taught online without formal lectures, meaning students will complete assigned work at a time of their choice, as long as they meet all deadlines. I have scheduled 5 virtual peer-edit group meetings at this time. I will form groups of 2-3 students who will discuss their writing assignment drafts with their classmates, prior to submitting final versions for grading a few days later. Attending these meetings is mandatory. I will take attendance and be available to answer questions.

Students are based in Madison and China (14 hrs ahead). To accommodate the different time zones, the current plan is to hold peer-edit meetings (~30-40 min) on the following **Mondays at 8:30 am:**

Feb 15

Mar 8

Mar 22

Apr 5

Apr 19

Instructional Mode: Self-directed learning with online material; small group meetings; one-on-one instructor meetings to discuss writing drafts (office hours or by appointment). Typically, AAE 721 students are in the Resource and Energy Demand Analysis (REDA) program, Visiting International Student Program (VISP) or Master of Science/Professional Option (MSPO) program.

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 Availability:

Office hours: W/Th 8:30-9:30 am Central

Course Description:

Professional communication is critical for a successful career as an applied 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 economic analyses from various specialties.

Reading material will introduce these ideas. Quizzes (at least three) about the reading material and five 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 technical material at variable levels of detail for different audiences, including those without degrees in economics or related fields.

Audiences you may encounter in future jobs include peer economists; scientists without training in economics; managers, clients, consultants and policymakers with or without technical backgrounds; journalists; and the general public. You will regularly use the online tool Readable (see below) to meet target readability scores within a word count limit.

Requisites and Basic Writing Skills:

Pre-requisites include AAE 636 and AAE 771. Many REDA, VISP and MSPO students take AAE 772 (4 credits) in the same semester as AAE 721.

AAE 721 is not designed to teach basic English writing skills. I may return *ungraded* any writing that I cannot evaluate for content and logical flow due to insufficient basic skills. If online tools designed to improve writing quality prove insufficient, you should independently seek out other resources to improve basic skills.

Example resources for English as a Second Language (ESL) students include: the Wisconsin ESL Institute ([WESLI](#); Jennifer Phillips, jennifer@wesli.com); the [ESL program](#), part of the Department of English; and the [UW Writing Center](#).

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](#) and [Grammarly](#) can 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 these in their own professional writing (executive summary, client memos, analysis reports etc.).
- Know how to communicate with different target audiences.
- Be able to summarize econometric analyses and explain their results to both experts and non-experts.
- Be able to place their own or others' analysis results into a larger context.

Grading:

There are **no midterm or final exams**.

Writing assignments: 75%

Quizzes: 10%

Participation in peer-edit meetings, engagement with the instructor: 15%

When you rewrite your drafts, please put effort into incorporating the feedback you receive at the peer-edit meetings. I will return all assignments with written comments. You have the **option** to revise ONE assignment after receiving a grade, by responding to my feedback and emailing me an updated version. I will not grade this version but will note the effort and the quality of edits in my gradebook. The deadline for rewrites is *one week* after receiving the graded assignment.

Points for each assignment are summed across elements of an evaluation rubric that I will provide in Canvas. I will also post a conversion of points to letter grades for all assignments.

Final grades depend heavily on writing assignments but will also incorporate quizzes and participation, as noted above. The percentages below serve as a guideline. 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 tools for detecting plagiarism, which means copying sentences or larger chunks of text from another writer and representing them as yours. Plagiarism may result in an F for the assignment. This includes submitting almost identical assignments as a fellow student. **Please submit your own original writing only.**

Textbooks and Software:

No textbooks are required but please purchase a monthly subscription to [Readable](#) (\$8/month). You may choose to maintain or cancel the subscription at the end of class. Click [here](#) for a 20% educational discount.

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/> (\$30)
- https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html (free; includes ESL resources)

- 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 was 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: You will typically use MS-Word and the online tools Readable (required) and [Grammarly](#) (optional). If the assignment includes tables and/or figures, please simplify and reformat versions you may have previously generated with other software (MS-Excel, Stata, R etc.).

Writing Assignments and Instructor Meetings:

I will provide word count limits and target readability scores for all assignments. An important part of writing about technical material for non-expert audiences is to stay within the word count limit. This may seem daunting initially but will become easier over time. It's not unusual to shorten a first draft substantially during the rewriting stage to stay within the word limit.

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 your draft to your group members by 3:00 pm on the Friday before Monday's peer-edit session**. Sending your draft later than that 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 writing assignments must have 1-inch margins and use a standard 11- or 12-point font (e.g., Arial, Calibri, Times New Roman).

Each student should aim for **at least one instructor meeting** (virtual or in-person, depending on the status of the pandemic) to discuss their draft of the current or previous writing assignment, emailed to me at least 24 hours before the meeting. I may also suggest a meeting after I have graded your assignment(s). The class is small this year and I look forward to interacting with you in person or virtually. I have found in my own career that writer/editor exchanges do help everyone become a better writer. Thus, feel free to ask for additional meetings or feedback via email anytime, as long as you do not simply send me an unpolished, quickly produced first draft hoping I will take care of improving it.

Once we have agreed on a meeting time, please come prepared. You should have revised your draft several times and done your best to minimize grammar and spelling errors. The word count and readability score should be close to target. You will receive a penalty (10% of points) for unexcused no-shows.

Deadlines:

Deadlines for all quizzes and assignments are final. You will receive a penalty (10-25% of points, depending on the delay) for missing them. Please give yourself enough time to complete quizzes before they close.

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 25	Introduction and syllabus.
Week 2	Feb 1	Reading: Selected chapters of <i>On Writing Well</i> (William Zinsser) Quiz 1 (about week 1 reading assignment).
Week 3	Feb 8	Reading: Readable writing for different audiences; strategies for summarizing complex material Quiz 2 (about week 2 reading assignment).
Week 4	<i>Feb 15</i> Feb 19	Reading: 2019 Nobel Prize in Economics; peer review guidelines Assignment 1: Summary of economics paper for economists <i>Peer edits of Ass. 1.</i>
Week 5	Feb 22	Reading: 2019 Nobel Prize in Medicine for different audiences
Week 6	Mar 1	Quiz 3 (about week 5 reading assignment) Assignment 2: Summary of economics paper for the general public
Week 7	<i>Mar 8</i> Mar 12	<i>Peer edits of Ass. 2.</i> Ass. 2 due in Canvas
Week 8	Mar 15	Reading: Readable writing for different audiences (continued) Assignment 3: Summary of economics paper for a younger audience
Week 9	<i>Mar 22</i> Mar 26	<i>Possible Quiz 4 (about week 8 reading assignment)</i> <i>Peer edits of Ass. 3.</i> Ass. 3 due in Canvas
Week 10	Mar 29	Reading: Business writing and executive summaries Assignment 4: Summary of your own analysis, part 1.
Week 11	<i>Apr 5</i> Apr 9	<i>Peer edits of Ass. 4.</i> Ass. 4 due in Canvas
Week 12	Apr 12	Reading: TBD Assignment 5: Summary of your own analysis, part 2
Week 13	<i>Apr 19</i>	<i>Peer edits of Ass. 5.</i>
Week 14	Apr 26 Apr 30	One-on-one instructor feedback (before, on or after Apr 26). Ass. 5 due in Canvas
Week 15	May 3	Final exam week (no exam for this course)