

Spring 2022
Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics (AAE)
University of Wisconsin-Madison
AAE 721: Professional Communication of Applied Economic Analysis

Instructor: Silke Schmidt, PhD (she/her/hers). silke.schmidt@wisc.edu

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Credits: One credit.

Canvas Course URL: <https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/295721>

Meeting Time and Location:

This course is designed primarily for students in the AAE Visiting International Student Program (VISP) or Master of Science-Professional Option (MSPO) program. Students engage with the instructor, the TA and their classmates in small-group and one-on-one meetings, during the scheduled class time and in office hours. The class meeting time is also used to take quizzes and work on writing assignments independently.

We will have **five** scheduled peer-edit meetings throughout the semester (and no meetings in room 103 otherwise). For these, I will form groups of 3-4 students who discuss their written drafts with their classmates before submitting final versions for grading. Attending the peer-edit meetings is mandatory. We will take attendance and be available to answer questions.

The peer-edit meetings will be held on the following **Mondays at 8:50 am** in 103 Taylor Hall:

Feb 21
Mar 7
Mar 21
Apr 11
Apr 25

Instructional Modality: Self-directed learning using instructor-provided material; group meetings; one-on-one meetings with instructor and TA to discuss writing drafts and learning material.

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

Office Hours:

Instructor: M 10-11 am, W 9:30-10:30 am, or by appointment (Zoom). Taylor Hall room 319.

TA: Tu 1-3 pm, or by appointment. Taylor Hall room 312.

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. Three quizzes 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 quantitative college-level training.

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

Prerequisites:

Students are expected to have prior knowledge of econometrics. They typically take AAE 635 in the fall and AAE 637 in the spring (concurrent with AAE 721). Some writing assignments in AAE 721 build upon AAE 637 analyses.

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 many language errors. Your TA is your first point of contact for discussing English as a Second Language (ESL) resources designed to improve your basic writing skills. I will note in my gradebook any documented efforts outside of class to take advantage of the following (or similar) resources:

- [ESL program](#), Department of English
- [UW Writing Center](#)
- Practicing English and Cultural Exchange ([PEACE](#)) program, International Student Services
- **English Corner** with Jordan van Rijn (Th 1:30-2:30, Master's lounge in Taylor Hall basement)
- Wisconsin ESL Institute ([WESLI](#); off-campus). Director: Jennifer Phillips, jennifer@wesli.com.
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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 heavily to produce a polished version for peer edits and grading. Online tools like [Grammarly](#) can help but may not be sufficient.

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 effectively with different target audiences.
- Be able to summarize economic analyses and explain their implications to experts and non-experts alike.
- Be able to place 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 TA and instructor: 15%

When you rewrite your drafts, please incorporate the feedback you receive at the peer-edit meetings. I will return all assignments with written comments. Points are summed across elements of an evaluation rubric that I will post in Canvas.

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 your rewrite is one week after receiving the graded assignment.

I plan to use the following cutoffs for final grades:

93%	A
88%	AB
83%	B
78%	BC
70%	C
60%	D
<60%	F

Final grades are not curved. I reserve the right to adjust these cutoffs downward; they will not be adjusted upward.

Canvas provides automated tools for detecting plagiarism, which means copying sentences or larger text pieces from another writer (including your classmates) and representing them as yours. Plagiarism may result in an F for the assignment. **Please submit your own original writing only.**

Textbooks and Software:

No textbooks are required but please purchase a subscription to [Readable](#) (\$6.40/month with monthly billing and educational discount). You may choose to maintain or cancel the subscription at the end of class. Click [here](#) for the 20% 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>. We will read selected chapters in the first reading assignment followed by a quiz.

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 another software package (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.

During this course, you will receive regular feedback on your writing from your peers, TA and instructor. To prepare for the peer-edit sessions on Mondays, please **email your draft to your group members by 2:30 pm on Fridays**. Sending your draft later than that will limit the ability of your peers to provide helpful feedback.

The final version for grading is due in Canvas on Friday after the peer-edit Mondays, as noted on the schedule below. All writing assignments should have 1-inch margins and use a standard 11- or 12-point font (e.g., Arial, Calibri, Times New Roman). **Please note the word count and readability score after your name at the top of the file.**

Each student should aim for **at least one virtual or in-person instructor meeting** to discuss their draft, emailed to me at least 24 hours before the meeting. I may also suggest a meeting after I have graded your assignment(s).

Feel free to ask for additional meetings or feedback via email, but do not expect others to turn a quickly produced first draft into a polished final version. Before asking for feedback, 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. For any *scheduled* in-person or virtual meetings, 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.

University-wide Policies:**Regular and Substantive Student-Instructor Interaction:**

As described on p. 1 of this syllabus.

How to Succeed in This Course:

You should complete all quizzes and writing assignments on time and as described in the provided instructions and engage regularly with your TA and instructor, as described above. Other campus resources and services that will help you succeed include:

[University Health Services](#)

[Undergraduate Academic Advising and Career Services](#)

[Office of the Registrar](#)

[Office of Student Financial Aid](#)

[Dean of Students Office](#)

[Graduate Student Services](#)

Course Evaluation:

You will have an opportunity to evaluate this course and your learning experience. Student participation is an integral component of this course, and your confidential feedback is important to me. I strongly encourage you to participate in the course evaluation.

Rules, Rights and Responsibilities:

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

Diversity and Inclusion Statement:

[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.

Academic Integrity Statement:

By virtue of enrollment, each student agrees to uphold the high academic standards of the University of Wisconsin-Madison; academic misconduct is behavior that negatively impacts the integrity of the institution. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these previously listed acts are examples of misconduct which may result in disciplinary action. Examples of disciplinary action include, but are not limited to, failure on the assignment/course, written reprimand, disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

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 ([UW-855](#)) require the university to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities to access and participate in its academic programs and educational services. Faculty and students share responsibility in the accommodation process.

Students are expected to inform the instructor of their need for instructional accommodations during the beginning of the semester, or as soon as possible after being approved for accommodations. I will work either directly with you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to provide reasonable instructional and course-related accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. (See: [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#))

Academic Calendar and Religious Observances:

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

Course Timeline:

Week	Date	Topic and/or Activity
Week 1	Jan 31	Introductions and syllabus.
Week 2	Feb 7	Reading: Selected chapters of <i>On Writing Well</i> by William Zinsser Quiz 1 (about week 1 reading assignment).
Week 3	Feb 14	Reading: Introduction to readable writing Quiz 2 (about week 2 reading assignment). Reading: strategies for summarizing complex material; peer review guidelines
Week 4	<i>Feb 21</i> Feb 25	Assignment 1: Summary of economics paper <u>for economists</u> <i>Peer edits of Ass. 1.</i> Ass. 1 due in Canvas
Week 5	Feb 28	Assignment 2: Summary of economics paper <u>for the general public</u>
Week 6	<i>Mar 7</i> Mar 11 Mar 14-18	<i>Peer edits of Ass. 2.</i> Assignment 3: Summary of economics paper <u>for a younger audience</u> Ass. 2 due in Canvas SPRING BREAK
Week 7	<i>Mar 21</i> Mar 25	<i>Peer edits of Ass. 3</i> Reading: Readable writing for different audiences Ass. 3 due in Canvas
Week 8	Mar 28	Quiz 3 (about week 7 reading assignment).
Week 9	Apr 4	Assignment 4: Summary of your own analysis, part 1
Week 10	<i>Apr 11</i> Apr 15	<i>Peer edits of Ass. 4</i> Ass. 4 due in Canvas
Week 11	Apr 18	Assignment 5: Summary of your own analysis, part 2
Week 12	<i>Apr 25</i>	<i>Peer edits of Ass. 5.</i>
Week 13	May 2 May 4	One-on-one instructor feedback (Apr 25-May 4). Ass. 5 due in Canvas
Week 14	May 9	Final exam week (no exam for this course)