

Spring 2023
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/345709>

Meeting Time and Location:

This course is designed for students in the AAE Visiting International Student Program (VISIP) and 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, both during the scheduled class time and in office hours. Class time is also used to take quizzes and work on writing assignments independently. There are no built-in options for make-up quizzes.

We will have **five** scheduled peer-edit meetings throughout the semester. 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 required; we will take roll each time.**

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

Feb 20

Mar 6

Mar 20

Apr 10

Apr 24

Three quizzes will be held on the following **Mondays at 8:50 am** in 103 Taylor Hall:

Feb 6

Feb 13

Mar 27

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

This 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, preparing for and completing quizzes and writing assignments, and other work as described in this syllabus.

Office Hours:

Instructor: M 10 am-12 pm, Taylor Hall room 322, and by appointment or instructor invitation.

TA: Th 12-2 pm, Taylor Hall room 314, and by appointment.

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 different 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 provide and incorporate editorial feedback. All writing assignments involve synthesizing and summarizing technical material at variable levels of detail for different audiences, including those without college-level training in quantitative science.

Audiences you may encounter in your 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 and 636 in the fall and AAE 637 in the spring (concurrent with AAE 721). Some writing assignments in AAE 721 are closely related to AAE 637 material.

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. Online tools like [Grammarly](#) are helpful but won't detect all errors. Your TA is your first point of contact for discussing English as a Second Language (ESL) resources designed to improve your basic communication skills. I will note in my gradebook your documented attendance at the following recommended events:

- **UW Writing Center** workshops (esp. grammar and style) and/or writing groups:
 - o <https://writing.wisc.edu/workshops/>
 - o <https://writing.wisc.edu/writinggroups/>
- **English Corner** with Jordan van Rijn (Th 2-3 pm, Taylor Hall)
- Practicing English and Cultural Exchange ([PEACE](#)) program, International Student Services
- [ESL program](#), Department of English

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 effectively with a range of target audiences.
- Be able to summarize different types of economic analyses and explain the intuition behind them to experts and non-experts alike.
- Be able to place analysis results into a larger context and reflect on their implications.

Grading:

Writing assignments: 70%

Quizzes: 15%

Participation, attendance, engagement with the TA and instructor: 15%

There are no midterm or final exams. Quality control checks of your peer review include a) evaluating examples of your written feedback and b) occasionally asking you to identify helpful peer editors. When you rewrite your drafts, please incorporate the feedback you received from your peers. I will return all assignments with written comments. Points are based on an evaluation rubric that I will post in Canvas.

You have the **option to revise one assignment** after receiving your grade by responding to my feedback and emailing me an updated version. I will not grade this version but will note the effort and quality of edits in my gradebook. The deadline for your rewrite is one week after receiving your grade.

I will 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 cutoffs downward; they will not be adjusted upward. Earning a B (or better) also requires meeting attendance expectations and adhering to all course deadlines.

Canvas provides automated tools for detecting **plagiarism**, which means copying language from another writer (including your classmates) or an AI tool and representing it 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, W. (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>. (Selected chapters make up the first reading assignment.)
- Strunk Jr., W., White, E.B. (1999). *The Elements of Style* (4th edition).
<https://www.amazon.com/Elements-Style-Fourth-William-Strunk/dp/020530902X>
- McCloskey, D.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.

[Reading](#) is one of the most effective ways to improve your writing skills! For this class, I recommend reading news about economics, energy and environmental topics. The UW library provides free access to many newspapers and magazines (e.g., *The Economist*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*). You can also **subscribe for free to The New York Times**. <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. You will likely shorten your first draft substantially during the rewriting stage to stay within the word limit.

You will receive regular feedback from your peers, TA and instructor. To give your peers sufficient time to add written comments and offer oral feedback during the Monday morning meetings, please upload your **draft** (in Canvas->Collaborations) by **1:30 pm on Fridays** and upload your **written feedback** (comments and/or track changes) **before 8:50 am on Mondays**. You will typically provide and receive additional oral feedback during your small-group discussions of the assignment on Mondays.

The **final version** for grading is due in Canvas on **Friday after the peer-edit meetings** (see Course Timeline below). Final versions should have 1-inch margins, use a standard 11- or 12-point font (Arial, Calibri, Times New Roman) and include your name, word count and readability score at the top.

You should aim for **at least two instructor meetings** to discuss drafts or course material. If you don't seek out meetings on your own, I may invite you to see me. If you wish to discuss drafts, please email them by 4 pm the day before a scheduled morning meeting and by 11 am for afternoon meetings. Unexcused no-shows for scheduled instructor meetings are equivalent to missed deadlines.

Please do not expect your peers, TA or instructor to turn a quickly produced first draft into a polished final version. Before asking for feedback from others, 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.

Deadlines and Course Policies:

Deadlines for all quizzes and assignments are **final** and not negotiable outside of highly unusual circumstances.

I expect you to attend all scheduled class meetings, to arrive on time and to actively participate in the peer review process. If you fall ill, please email me prior to class and schedule a Zoom meeting to discuss make-up options. Your participation/attendance grade starts with 100 pts; you lose 20 pts for each unexcused absence or missed deadline and 15-20 pts for frequent tardiness. It is your responsibility to notify me *within the first two weeks of the semester* of any conflicts between meeting times/deadlines and university-recognized religious observance days (see below).

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

As described on p. 1 of this syllabus.

Teaching & Learning Data Transparency Statement:

The privacy and security of faculty, staff and students' personal information is a top priority for UW-Madison. The university carefully reviews and vets all campus-supported digital tools used to support teaching and learning, to help support success through [learning analytics](#), and to enable proctoring capabilities. View the university's full teaching and learning [data transparency statement](#).

Privacy of Student Records & the Use of Audio Recorded Lectures Statement:

Lecture materials and recordings for this course are protected intellectual property at UW-Madison. Students in courses may use the materials and recordings for their personal use related to participation in class. Students may also take notes solely for their personal use. If a lecture is not already recorded, students are not authorized to record lectures without permission unless they are considered by the university to be a qualified student with a disability who has an approved accommodation that includes recording. [Regent Policy Document 4-1] Students may not copy or have lecture materials and recordings outside of class, including posting on internet sites or selling to commercial entities, with the exception of sharing copies of personal notes as a notetaker through the McBurney Disability Resource Center. Students are otherwise prohibited from providing or selling their personal notes to anyone else or being paid for taking notes by any person or commercial firm without the instructor's express written permission. Unauthorized use of these copyrighted lecture materials and recordings constitutes copyright infringement and may be addressed under the university's policies, UWS Chapters 14 and 17, governing student academic and non-academic misconduct. View [more information about FERPA](#).

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. 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](#)

Digital Course Evaluation:

You will have the opportunity to evaluate this course and your learning experience. UW-Madison uses a [digital course evaluation](#) survey tool, typically available two weeks prior to the end of the semester. You will receive an email with a link to log into the course evaluation with your NetID. Evaluations are anonymous. Student participation is an integral component of course development, and confidential feedback is important to the institution. UW-Madison strongly encourages student participation in course evaluations.

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 [sanctions](#) 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 30	Introductions and syllabus.
Week 2	Feb 6	Reading 1: Selected chapters of <i>On Writing Well</i> by William Zinsser Quiz 1 (about Reading 1).
Week 3	Feb 13	Reading 2: Introduction to readable writing Quiz 2 (about Reading 2). Reading: strategies for summarizing complex material; peer review guidelines; NYT tips for editing your own work Assignment 1: Summary of economics paper <u>for economists</u>
Week 4	<i>Feb 20</i> Feb 24	<i>Peer edits of Ass. 1.</i> Ass. 1 due in Canvas
Week 5	Feb 27	Assignment 2: Summary of economics paper <u>for the general public</u>
Week 6	<i>Mar 6</i> Mar 10 Mar 13-17	<i>Peer edits of Ass. 2.</i> Assignment 3: Summary of economics paper <u>for a young audience</u> Ass. 2 due in Canvas SPRING BREAK
Week 7	<i>Mar 20</i> Mar 24	<i>Peer edits of Ass. 3</i> Reading 3: Readable writing for different audiences Ass. 3 due in Canvas
Week 8	Mar 27	Quiz 3 (about Reading 3).
Week 9	Apr 3	Assignment 4: Summary of economics paper (audience TBD)
Week 10	<i>Apr 10</i> Apr 14	<i>Peer edits of Ass. 4</i> Ass. 4 due in Canvas
Week 11	Apr 17	Assignment 5: Summary of paper and your own analysis (audience TBD)
Week 12	<i>Apr 24</i>	<i>Peer edits of Ass. 5.</i>
Week 13	May 1 May 4	One-on-one instructor feedback (Apr 18-May 3). Ass. 5 due in Canvas
Week 14	May 8	Final exam week (no exam for this course)