

**Spring 2025**  
**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](mailto:silke.schmidt@wisc.edu)

**Teaching Assistant:** Dimitris Friesen, M.S. (he/him/his). [dfriesen@wisc.edu](mailto:dfriesen@wisc.edu)

**Course Description:** Professional communication for careers in applied economics. Writing for technical and non-technical audiences, including writing about research findings for client memos, executive summaries, detailed analysis reports etc.

**Designation:** 50% graduate coursework requirement.

**Instructional Modality:** In-person.

**Credit Hour Statement:** By taking this **one-credit** course, students will engage in at least 45 hours of learning activities. This includes 6 classroom hours for discussions of writing assignments and peer reviews, 3 classroom hours for quizzes with writing exercises and questions about assigned reading material, 6 hours for reading assignments/quiz preparation and 30 hours for writing assignments, including at least one hour of one-on-one instructor meetings.

**Canvas:** <https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/449216>

**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 attendance each time.

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

Feb 17

Mar 3

Mar 17

Apr 7

Apr 21

**Three quizzes** (incl. writing exercises) will be held on the following **Mondays at 8:50 am**, 103 TH:

Feb 3

Feb 10

Mar 31

**Office Hours:**

**Instructor:** W 1-2 pm (Zoom), F 11-12 pm (Taylor Hall 316); and by appointment or invitation.

**TA:** Tu 9:30-11:30 am, Taylor Hall 312, and by appointment.

## Extended Course Description:

Professional communication is critical for a successful career as an applied economist who may be asked to produce client memos, executive summaries and more detailed analysis reports. 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 analyses from different subfields of applied economics.

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

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 from AAE 636 (fall). Some writing assignments are closely related to material taught in AAE 637 or AAE 719 (concurrent).

AAE 721 is not designed to teach basic English writing skills, and I will return *ungraded* any writing that I cannot evaluate for content and logical flow due to abundant basic errors. Below are several English as a Second Language (ESL) resources designed to improve basic communication skills. Participating in these events is not a course requirement, but I will note your documented attendance (email confirmation) as engagement points in my gradebook.

- **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
- Practicing English and Cultural Exchange ([PEACE](#)) program, International Student Services

**Course Learning Outcomes:** Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Identify and use elements of reader-friendly writing strategies.
- Communicate effectively with technical and non-technical audiences.
- Summarize different types of econometric analyses and explain the intuition behind them to non-economists.
- Place analysis results into a larger context and reflect on their implications.
- Differentiate between some of the ethical and non-ethical uses of generative AI tools as writing/editing assistants in a professional setting.

## Grading:

Writing assignments: 70%

In-class quizzes: 15%

Participation in peer reviews, attendance, engagement with instructor/TA: 15% (rubric in Canvas)

There are no midterm or final exams. Written peer reviews will not receive a formal grade, but we will assess whether you have a) put effort into helping your peers improve their drafts and b) incorporated peer feedback into your final versions. All graded assignments will include written TA and/or instructor comments and will use rubrics posted in Canvas.

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

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 cutoffs downward but will not adjust them upward. **To earn at least grade B, you need to meet attendance expectations and adhere to all course deadlines.**

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

## Generative AI tools (chatbots):

The main goal of AAE 721 is to help you build and improve your own writing skills, with a focus on applied economics. In addition, we will explore the use of chatbots as writing and editing assistants.

Some assignments will ask you to confirm with your signature that you have **not** used a chatbot to generate text. I will also ask you to disclose whether you have used a chatbot **only** to correct English language errors in your own original writing. I will consider dishonesty in answering these questions as academic misconduct. Consequences according to UW-Madison policy are described [here](#).

One of the assignments will ask you to generate text with a chatbot and then critique and edit it to achieve one of the stated learning objectives. I will provide specific instructions as part of the assignment.

## Textbooks and Software:

No textbooks are required but please purchase a subscription to [Readable](#): \$6.40/month with monthly billing or \$3.20/month with annual billing. For an educational [discount](#), email [hi@readable.com](mailto:hi@readable.com).

### Recommended references:

- Zinsser, W. (1976). *On Writing Well*. **Free** 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition (2006) in Canvas. 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/> (\$50)
- [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue\\_owl.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html) (free; includes ESL resources)
- Grammar training and quiz, courtesy of the School of Journalism:  
<https://202.journalism.wisc.edu/training-2-2/> (free; click on Grammar Training).

**Reading** is one of the most effective ways to improve your writing skills. For this class, I recommend news about economics, energy and environmental topics. The UW library provides free access to many newspapers and magazines, such as *The Economist*, *Washington Post*, *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*, described at <https://researchguides.library.wisc.edu/newspapers>.

**Software:** You will typically use MS-Word and the online tool Readable (required). Should the assignment include tables and/or figures, you may have to simplify and reformat versions previously generated with another software package (MS-Excel, Stata, R etc.).

## Writing Assignments and Instructor Meetings:

I will provide target word counts and readability scores for all assignments. Staying within the word count limit may seem daunting initially but will become easier over time. Your first draft may be (much) longer; eliminating non-essential information will be a big part of the rewriting stage.

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 the Canvas Peer Reviews section) by **1:30 pm on Fridays** and upload your **written feedback** (comments and/or track changes) **before 8:50 am on Mondays**. You will also provide and receive oral feedback during your small-group discussions 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 one-on-one 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. To ensure productive meetings, I

will provide a deadline for emailing me your draft that leaves enough time for me to review it. 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. Since class absences and tardiness reduce your ability to participate in peer reviews and class discussions, they have the greatest impact on the participation/attendance part of your grade.

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). Booked flights for spring break are not a valid excuse for missing in-class quizzes.

#### **University-wide Policies:**

**Regular and Substantive Student-Instructor Interaction:** As described in 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 these 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:** [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:** 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 with Due Dates:

Week	Date	Topic and/or Activity
Week 1	Jan 27	Introductions and syllabus review.
Week 2	<b>Feb 3</b>	<b>Reading 1:</b> Selected chapters of <i>On Writing Well</i> by William Zinsser <b>Quiz 1</b> (about Reading 1)
Week 3	<b>Feb 10</b>	<b>Reading 2:</b> Text and visual research paper summaries <b>Quiz 2</b> (about Reading 2)
Week 4	<b>Feb 17</b>	Homework 1: Study designs in applied economics with examples <b>Peer reviews of HW 1.</b>
	Feb 21	HW 1 due in Canvas
Week 5	Feb 24	Homework 2: Paper summary <u>for an adult audience</u>
Week 6	<b>Mar 3</b>	<b>Peer reviews of HW 2.</b>
	Mar 7	HW 2 due in Canvas
Week 7	Mar 10	Homework 3: Paper summary <u>for a young audience</u> , chatbot assistance
Week 8	<b>Mar 17</b>	<b>Chatbot exercises and discussions for HW 3.</b>
		<b>Reading 3:</b> Summarizing the same content for different audiences.
	Mar 21	HW 3 due in Canvas
	Mar 24-28	SPRING BREAK
Week 9	Mar 31	<b>Quiz 3</b> (about Reading 3)
		Homework 4: Replication dataset analysis and summary (audience TBD)
	TBD	Data analysis lab for HW 4.
Week 10	<b>Apr 7</b>	<b>Peer reviews of HW 4.</b>
		One-on-one instructor/TA feedback (Apr 7-11).
	Apr 11	HW 4 due in Canvas
Week 11	Apr 14	Homework 5: Replication dataset analysis and summary (audience TBD)
	TBD	Data analysis lab for HW 5.
Week 12	<b>Apr 21</b>	<b>Peer reviews of HW 5.</b>
Week 13	Apr 28	One-on-one instructor/TA feedback (Apr 21-May 2).
	May 2	HW 5 due in Canvas
Week 14	May 5	Final exam week (no exam for this course)