

More on “W” Classes

(Taken mostly verbatim from Prof. W. Owen, Past Chair of the WAC Committee)

Writing Assignments:

This course is designated as a Writing Course (W). This means that a significant portion of your grade will be derived from writing assignments. One of the most important skills of our profession is effective communication. Geologists are expected to communicate clearly with many audiences. The assignments of this course will allow you an opportunity to practice these skills. In all assignments, you should focus on understanding the specific audience so that the writing clearly communicates with them.

Writing Process:

Clear writing demands good idea organization, correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling. The process of producing clear and concise documents usually requires: (1) pre-planning, research, thought, and organization, (2) writing a draft, (3) a small pause before the editing, and (4) revision(s) to produce the final version. This process can benefit from external proofreading. You might consider having someone else read your draft and assist in the revision process.

The University provides the Writing Center as a service to improve the process of writing. This is not a “proofreading” service; but they can provide advice that can improve your writing. These folks are a valuable asset. You can call and make an appointment with a Writing Center Consultant (460-6480). They are located in 207 Alpha Hall East. Check out their website (URL: www.southalabama.edu/writing/). It has a lot of useful information.

Editing a document that you have written is an “ego” crushing affair. I get out a red pencil and mark my work ruthlessly. I remove excess words and seek better words to make my communication clearer. Allow yourself ample time for this iterative process. Be sure that you use all of the word processing tools at your disposal (spelling, thesaurus, and grammar checkers are helpful).

For these assignments, you should produce a draft, then edit and revise it before submitting it for grading. All assignments, in this class, will be graded and feedback provided (usually in the form of notes written in the margins). You will have an opportunity to reflect upon the comments and revise your submission. However, this writing approach assumes that you have been through the draft and revision phase.

Formal Peer Reviews:

A process of formal peer review is helpful in producing a document that is well written. In this class, several of the assignments will use a peer review. The function of a peer reviewer is to read a document and make critical remarks that will help to improve it. For example, when reading a section that is confusing, the comment “**I do not understand. or Unclear??**” might help the author identify a section for more work.

As a reviewer, you want to be as specific as possible without re-writing the paper. Peer review focuses upon the meaning and how clearly the author is describing the topic and expanding ideas logically. Remember that style is a personal preference, your style is correct for you and not necessarily for your peer.

Point out obvious errors, point out areas that are awkward or confusing. As a reviewer resist the temptations to: (1) fail to criticize because it is a “fellow student”, or (2) suggest changes for the sake of making changes “the teacher said to.”

In this class, you are required to peer review each others work. When reviewing, keep the assignment goals in mind, and make constructive comments. As the author, take the comments as they are intended - “to improve the clarity of your paper.” Prepare two (2) copies of you draft for

peer reviewing. Each peer reviewer will complete a peer review form, that will be turned in at the end of the peer review class, as an indication of peer review. Place your initials and data in the margin of the papers you review and return them to the author.

Authors should consider the comments and strengthen the paper before submitting it for grading. It is common to disagree with the reviewer; but remember that an indication of confusion or misunderstanding from a reviewer means that clear communication is not occurring. Try to improve your writing.

Turn in your final draft along with the two peer-reviewed drafts.

Editing Symbols: There are a set of common editing symbols that are useful as a shorthand method of communicating editing suggestions. Any good dictionary will provide a table of editing symbols. [Note: Try Google (Search = proofreading symbols); See also - URL: webster.comnet.edu/writing/symbols.htm]

Re-submission Policy:

In this course you may **resubmit** each assignment once. It is your choice. After the initial grading and feedback, you may choose to re-work your assignment and resubmit for a higher grade. However, you must understand that you cannot expect to boost your grade to a perfect score. Similarly, you should not turn in a paper in need of a lot of work, expect the reviewers to indicate the changes, make them, and expect a huge boost in you grade.

When turning in a re-submission, you must: (1)clearly mark it as a **"RE-SUBMISSION"** on the first page and (2) include the original graded submission. The re-submission will be reviewed and returned as soon as possible.

Technical Details:

Margins: Top 1" Line Spacing: Single or 1
Left 1.5" Font: Times (or similar)
Right 1" Font Size: 12 point only
Bottom 1"

Header: Each page should have the author's name, class name, and page number. Use the wordprocessor to help here

Title: Include a title on the first page that indicates the nature of the assignment. This is NOT a separate sheet of paper!

Paper: 8 ½ x 11 inch, white

Fastening: **Stapled** in upper left corner only - No folders required or wanted. I provide staple for unstapled submissions at the cost of 5 points per staple.

Disk: An electronic copy of your assignment may be required. See the assignment directions for details