Teaching Writing in the Professions Online: A Case Study

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Writing is still best taught face-to-face between teacher and student.

Mark Bauerlein. (2010.) Missing the personal connection. *New York Times* online, March 3, 2010. Viewed at http://roomfordebate.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/03/03/college-degrees-without-going-to-class/#robert. Visited March 4, 2010.

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This session describes the experience of teaching writing online.

Educational Communication

- Developed in response to a request
- Provided as an open undergraduate elective
- Taught asynchronously
- Offered through the online unit of a North American university

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The team leveraged existing materials, skills, and technologies.

- Based on a classroom-based technical writing course.
- Developed by the instructor with the instructional design team at the university's e-learning unit
  - Instructional designer
  - Videography team
  - Graphic designer
  - Programmer
  - Administrator
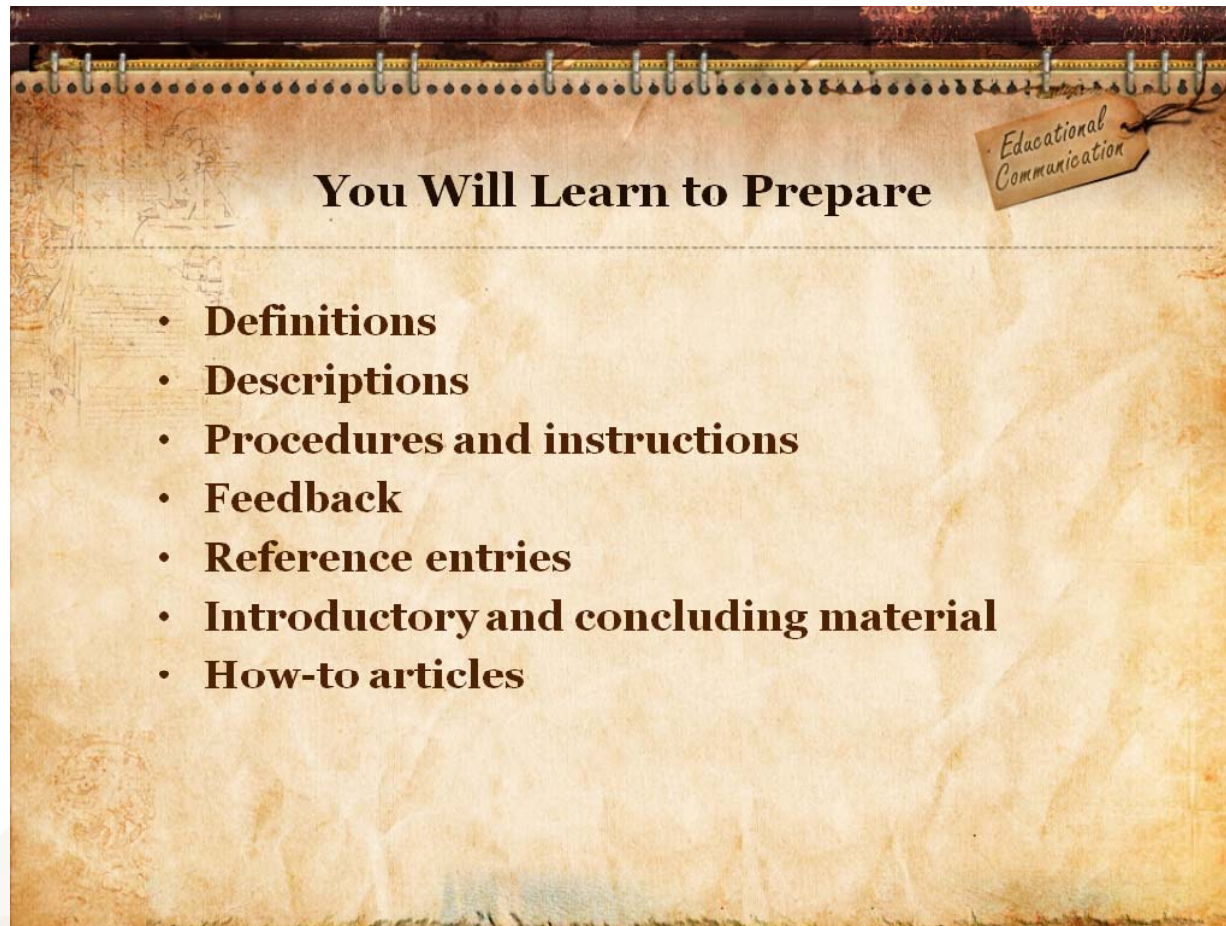- Runs on a proprietary Learning Management System

The course follows a *genre-based* approach.

Emphasizes basic forms of writing (such as definitions, procedures, and reference entries.)

Focuses on purpose of form, how people use it, and *generic conventions* for it.

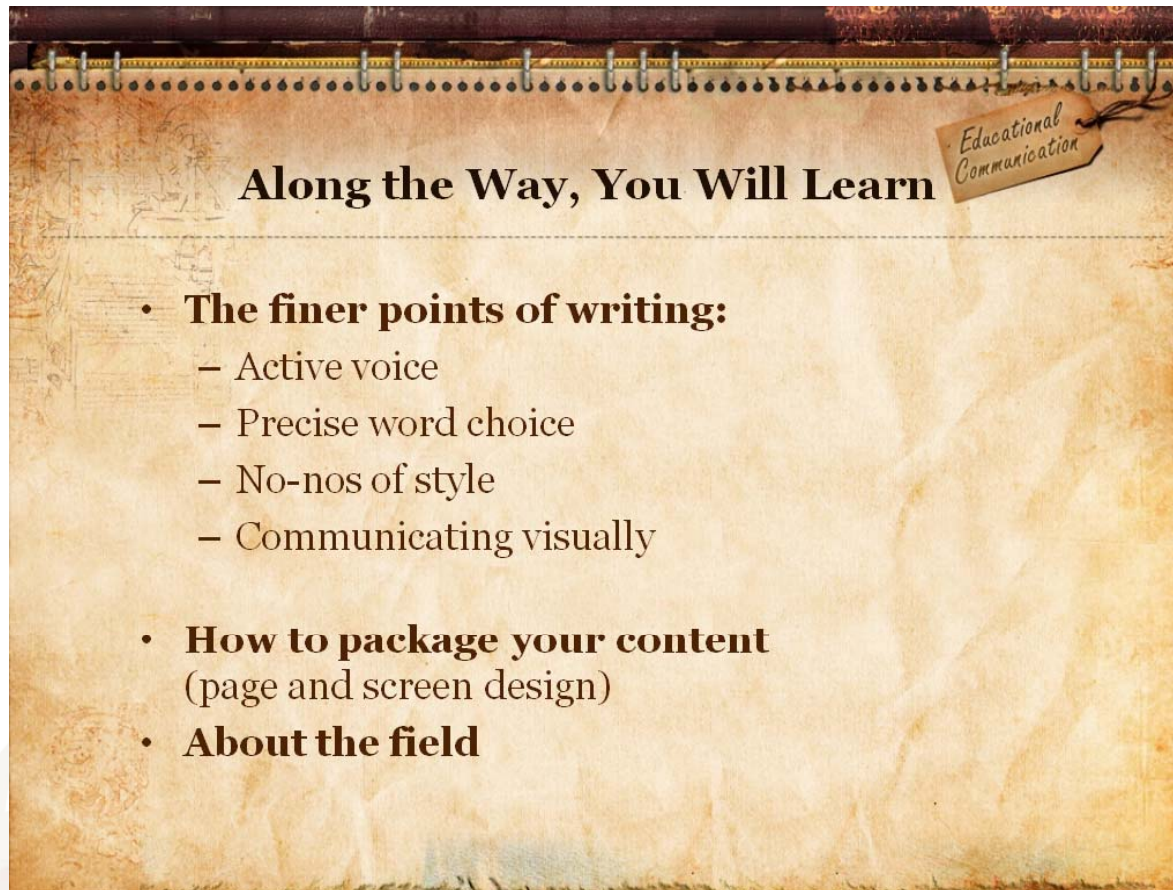The course assesses learners on their ability to follow form.

The course covers many basic genres.

You Will Learn to Prepare

Educational Communication

- Definitions
- Descriptions
- Procedures and instructions
- Feedback
- Reference entries
- Introductory and concluding material
- How-to articles

Each lesson explores the genre and a related issue of "style."
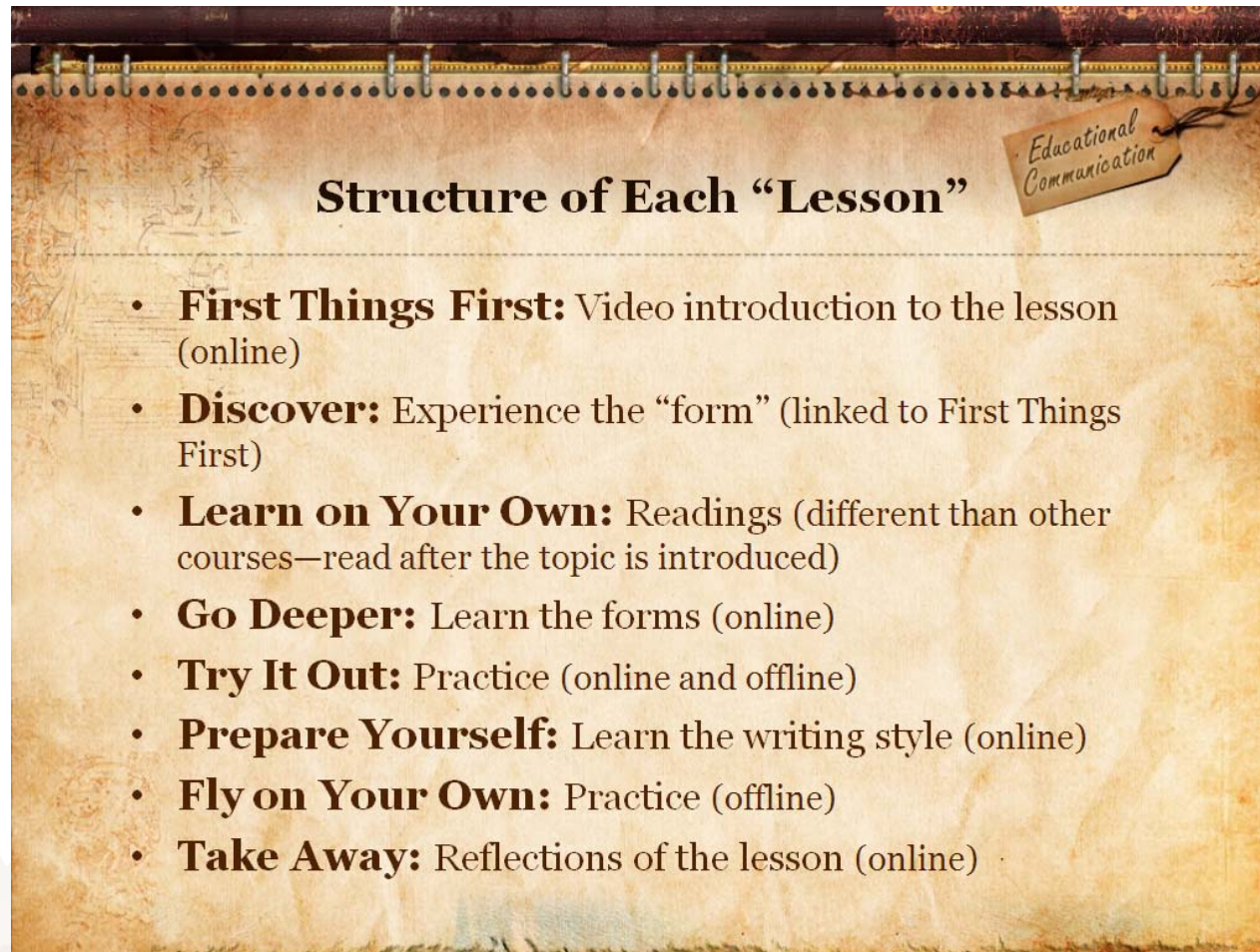

Along the Way, You Will Learn

Educational Communication

- **The finer points of writing:**
  - Active voice
  - Precise word choice
  - No-nos of style
  - Communicating visually

- **How to package your content** (page and screen design)
- **About the field**

Each lesson has a consistent structure.

Structure of Each "Lesson"

Educational Communication

- **First Things First:** Video introduction to the lesson (online)
- **Discover:** Experience the "form" (linked to First Things First)
- **Learn on Your Own:** Readings (different than other courses—read after the topic is introduced)
- **Go Deeper:** Learn the forms (online)
- **Try It Out:** Practice (online and offline)
- **Prepare Yourself:** Learn the writing style (online)
- **Fly on Your Own:** Practice (offline)
- **Take Away:** Reflections of the lesson (online)

Students are assessed through a combination of practical assignments and exams.

- Assignments (50%)
  - Definition
  - Description
  - Procedure
  - Reference entry
- Participation (10%)
  - Discussion board
  - Reading guide sheet
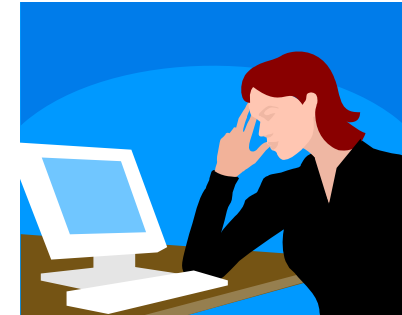- Exam, with how-to article (40%)

In response to feedback, we have revised the course.

- Added resources to assist teaching assistants with grading
- Pre-wrote a series of notes from the instructor to students to support them in starting the course
- For the coming year, plan to add:
  - Units on writing objectives and lessons plans, and a style
  - Style lesson on preparing visuals

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Outcomes are encouraging.

★ ★ ★ ★

(out of 5)

Positive student Evaluations

Student performance is similar to the classroom.

Questions