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.

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
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

- 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

• 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”

- **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
Outcomes are encouraging.

★★★★★
(out of 5)
Positive student Evaluations

Student performance is similar to the classroom.
Questions