EFFECTIVE WRITING
IN PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

Persuasive, accurate, readable writing is crucial to Public Policy and Planning and to active citizenship. This course offers techniques for understanding the needs of multiple audiences, framing and organizing ideas, and developing a “voice” that will influence readers in the “real world.” We will work with tools for critical and creative thinking, supportive feedback, and audience awareness through short weekly writing assignments including at least three drafts of your chosen longer writing project in public communication and a short memo. This term also: a closer look at policy memos as written in state government.

General Requirements (for details on written assignments, see end of syllabus):

1.) Attendance/timeliness, participation, drafts ON TIME, community-building.
2.) An informal writer’s journal: 2-3 pages daily; 4-7 days a week. (Your comments on it, not the journal itself, are turned in.)
3.) A public writing project in three drafts (including final version). This is a 750-3,000-word piece of writing chosen to fit in with your work, school, professional, or activist interests. The emphasis is on offering information & new perspectives to the public, which could include a report, memo, letter, or proposal (for work); a thesis chapter or paper for another course (school) **; or an advocacy piece or magazine, newsletter, blog or newspaper article (your other interests). Choose something you WANT to write about and can realistically tackle in a 5-week period. (See below for more detail on projects.)
First draft (“mad draft”) is DUE June 4; 2nd draft, June 16; final draft, June 25.
4.) Short writing assignments: (a)DUE by email May 27: 3 pages of informal writing describing your personal goals for the course and three possible options for your main course project. (b)DUE June 11: Memo
5.) A portfolio of your course work to date, containing all short assignments, drafts, and journal updates and turned in with drafts DUE June 4, 16, and 25.
6.) Final written comment on course experience. DUE June 25 with portfolio.

This course emphasizes the process of writing, not evaluation of results. It is a pass-fail course with the assumption that a good writing process will lead to excellent writing. A passing grade is based on fulfilling the above requirements, including bringing your writing project to completion.

Readings:
Xerox: H. Becker, Writing for Social Scientists, Ch. 2;  L. Dunlap, “Advocacy & Neutrality,”

**Note:** Please don’t choose a thesis PROPOSAL. Past experience shows that ideas change too much in proposal-writing to focus on public communication. (Also your audience is limited to your advisor and committee—not really “public.”)


**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Week #1**  
May 21: Hands on work with tools and dynamics of this course  
- What is “social change writing”? Private and public writing. Freewriting.  
- Introductions, hopes, and concerns. Syllabus, requirements, tools, dynamics, and focus.

**Week #2**  
May 26 HOLIDAY  
May 27: Short writing assignment (options for your project) due at noon by email to changewrite@earthlink.net

May 28: Bring plans for advocacy letter to editor, decision-maker or CEO  
- Reading: Dunlap, Chapter 3, The FREWRITING Tool, Chapter 4, The PROCESS Tool, and Chapter 5, The THINKING Tool

**Week #3**  
June 2: Quick-speak draft  
- A two to three minute oral presentation on your project  
- More on freewriting, writing process, and thinking tools

June 4: Mad draft due (with self-comment, portfolio & journal update)  
- Introduction to audience analysis

**Week #4**  
June 9: Prepare audience analysis for your project  
- Visiting speaker, Amy Schectman Associate Director for Public Housing and Rental Assistance, Massachusetts Department of Housing & Community Development  
- Reading: Dunlap, Ch. 6, The AUDIENCE Tool

June 11: Memo due  
- First session of feedback on course project in small groups

**Week #5**  
June 16: Project 2nd draft due (with self-comment, portfolio, & journal update).  
- Reading: Dunlap, Ch. 7 The FEEDBACK Tool  
- More feedback in small groups

June 18: More feedback  
- More on memos  
- Feedback in small groups

**Week #6**  
June 23: Editing and fine-tuning: grammar/WORD-POWER clinic:  
- Reading: Strunk & White, *Elements of Style*  
- Reading: Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists*  
- Reading: Dunlap, Ch. 8. The WORD-POWER Tool

June 25: Final draft due--in portfolio (with all previous drafts; journal updates; memo plus revision [if needed]; and self-comments on project & course).  
- Small groups & sharing. Next steps. Feedback on the course.
WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS (DETAILS)
Please type all writing (except your journal), DOUBLE SPACE, and hand in paper version (except on May 27). Leave wide margins & lots of white space for feedback.

A. INFORMAL WRITER’S JOURNAL ***
(See end of handout, because this item is pretty lengthy.)

B. FIRST SHORT ASSIGNMENT: YOUR PROJECT OPTIONS
Three pages of informal writing briefly describing (1) your writing experience to date and your wishes and concerns for this course and (2) THREE options you are considering for your main course project. (See below for suggestions about projects.) For EACH option please think about:
  • Your audience and your purposes in writing for this audience
  • Information sources (what you already have and how you’ll get the rest)
  • Length of project and ideas for organizing it
  • What are the challenges and benefits for you in undertaking this option?
If you wish, include your thoughts about which option you think you’ll choose. I’ll be giving you my feedback the next day, but the first (“mad”) draft will be due the week after you turn this in so don’t put off getting started. Please encourage yourself to use whatever “voice” or form of organization feels right to you.

C. MAIN COURSE PROJECT—in three drafts
This is a 3 – 12 page piece of writing you choose to fit in with your work, school, or other personal, professional, or political interests. The emphasis is on offering information & new perspectives to a public or policy audience (not merely an academic audience). In the past, people have done reports, memos, letters, brochures etc. (for work); thesis chapters or papers for another course (school); and advocacy pieces or magazine, newsletter, or newspaper articles (connected with other interests). Choose something you WANT to write about and can realistically tackle in a 6-week period. (A thesis proposal is not a good choice because experience shows that ideas change too much while you’re drafting to allow you to concentrate on the WRITING and on a public audience.)

To avoid “the dangerous method” (trying to write something “right” the first time around) we do this project in three stages—four if you count the “options” assignment as a stage. Shortly after getting feedback on your “options,” a “mad draft” of the course project is due. For a mad draft, you try to get as much of the piece down on paper as you can. It’s OK to leave it in rough form—you can leave blanks, include notes to yourself, invent information or whatever you need to do to get the whole thing OUT. You’ll turn the mad draft in with your portfolio, including the options assignment and YOUR OWN COMMENTS ON YOUR MAD DRAFT.

After the mad draft, you’ll have feedback both from me and from a small group of other students to help strengthen your second and final drafts. You’ll also do a formal audience analysis. The second version will probably be VERY different—ideas will shift,
organizational strategy will change, new concepts will emerge. The growth of a writing project is a process of wrestling with ideas.
In a third (final) draft, you’ll have a chance to edit for effective language. At each stage, readings and discussion will support the process. For each draft, turn in your full portfolio (of previous drafts) and your own comments on the current draft.

D. MEMO
We will discuss guidelines for this assignment in class. The idea is a brief, accessible 1-2 page memo to a decision-maker making a case for taking action. You can use subject matter from your real-life experience (and actually send the memo later on) or we will provide a subject in the discussion with our visiting lecturer on June 9.

E. PORTFOLIO
The portfolio is your total course work to date. Whenever you turn in a draft, you include the whole portfolio—which means all previous drafts and assignments as well as past and current journal updates. Include a “self-comment,” i.e. your own comments on your current draft. This gives me a chance to see your work in the context of how it is developing and how you are feeling about it. It gives you a chance to watch ideas grow.

F. FINAL COMMENT
When you turn in your final draft and portfolio, please look back over all the writing you’ve done, including your journal. Then comment in whatever way you wish on the changes or development you see in your own drafts, journal, and course experience. What changed for you? What challenges do you face now? What helped or didn’t help? Specific suggestions and comments will be useful to me in planning future courses.

*** INFORMAL WRITER’S JOURNAL AND JOURNAL UPDATES
The journal is the private place where you write regularly—daily or at least 4-5 times a week during the five weeks of this course. It is just for you, not to show to anyone unless you choose to. You will be writing 2-3 pages per day, mostly using “freewriting” rather than laboring over what to say. I hope it will be a pleasant and liberating experience.

Goals of the journal:
• To become comfortable with freewriting and other personal techniques that nourish the roots of all communication, even public communication.
• To try out techniques like listing, matrices, and drawing for generating powerful ideas for your course project.
• To create raw material for this course or other writing projects
• To reflect on what you are learning in this course.
• To explore your natural creativity and your “voice” at a deeper level.
• To develop an ongoing “practice” that may serve you in many ways after the course.

Handwriting or computer?
This depends on you, but it’s important to have all your journal-writing in one place so you can SEE it (i.e., not “virtual”). I suggest a notebook that feels good to you for writing
by hand. If you much prefer to use a computer, please print out your journal entries and keep them in a three-hole binder, along with the other journal writing you’ll do in class (so you can review it physically all in one place). Each person will create a slightly different format for this journal. At some point in the course, you’ll be asked to bring the journal to class and show how you’re doing it (Although I hope you will want to, you will never be required to share what you write.)

Privacy and the “journal update”:
Because so many problems stem from others’ (or our own) judgments of our writing, this journal needs to be completely free from outside evaluation. If you WANT to share things from the journal, there will be opportunities, but nothing will be collected, evaluated, or “marked.” You will never be required to share freewriting. On the other hand, this six-week course is supposed to offer a supportive “push” toward healthy habits that are hard to establish on one’s own. To help you stay faithful, please include a “journal update” every time you turn in your portfolio. This can take any form you want: you can report on subjects written about, insights or difficulties; you can include some bits of what you’ve written that you’re willing to share. You can record the highlights of your journal-writing experience. How has this exercise gone for you? This is your record of progress.

What to write about in the journal:
The main point is to DO the writing every day—no matter what it’s about. Because the emphasis is on freewriting, you have to stay free from the “assignment” mode and write on what has energy for you at that moment. (You don’t have to freewrite every entry.) *Undoing the Silence* has many suggestions for freewriting but here are some more to stimulate your journal-writing:

1. Freewrite about whatever is on your mind when you sit down to write. Just getting used to processing your feelings and concerns (no matter how mundane) in written words is beneficial (and people find it helps them plan their day, make decisions, relieve stress, etc.) These days, I’m writing a lot about the world situation.

2. Explore questions about yourself as a writer. Tell stories about your successes—what made things work out?—and investigate your “demons” or obstacles as a writer. Julia Cameron says to acknowledge and grieve “creative injuries” (otherwise they “become creative scar tissue and block your growth.”) Have you experienced injuries to your creativity—like “friends” or teachers who put you down? Can you begin to explore them here?

3. Explore dimensions in your thinking: what visual, metaphoric, logical, or other kinds of thinking are you good at that usually don’t get expressed in words? Are you more comfortable with the left or the right side of the brain? (Why?) Draw pictures and write about them, tell stories, try informal poems or songs.

4. Explore the world of sensory phenomena around you this summer. Sit down in a pleasant outdoor place (or a busy café, T station, or jazz club) and write about what you see, hear, smell, taste. (There are lots of suggestions for this kind of exploration in Natalie Goldberg’s book, *Writing Down the Bones.*)

5. Write about dreams, memories, inspirational people, good conversations.
6. Explore pain or trauma you’ve experienced. In a recent study, 40% of the people asked to write every day about “the most painful thing that has happened in your life” resolved serious health issues like asthma and arthritis (as compared to only 20% in a control group asked to write about the more trivial issues of daily life.)

7. Write about your “generative themes,” Paulo Freire’s name for the serious issues that engage your deepest energy at the moment. Maybe for you it’s family issues or your career or maybe it’s something like racism or nuclear weapons. Maybe it’s what you would like to say to your boss. What “pushes your buttons”? (Natalie Goldberg encourages us to write about our “obsessions”.)

8. Write about something useful: the ideas you hope to bring out in an interview or speech; the insights you draw from a meeting, conference, lecture, or reading; the problems you see with something you need to analyze. Freewriting is a powerful way to prepare for public communication and the best way to distill and reflect on what went on afterwards.

9. Write about your project: What questions do you want it to answer? Who will actually read it and how do you want them to react? What’s holding you back from writing at the moment? Or what’s working well as you write?

10. Keep your own list of things you want to write about and pull it out if something doesn’t just float to the surface when you take out your journal.

In class, we will be trying out various processes and “triggers” to help us bypass the internal censors that make writing difficult for so many. Feel free to adapt any of these (or invent new ones) in your journal.