

Highly Effective Professional Writing



Organization
Location

Month XX, 20XX



Miles Miniaci,
Instructor

Course Description

This eight-week course focuses on best practices for business writing in the banking industry, including both external and internal documents. Topics covered include critical thinking and best practices for developing a writing process; specific strategies such as audience awareness, control of tone, and clear communication techniques; and sentence-level skills focused on concision, active emphasis, and appropriate word choice. Direct practice will be provided in industry-specific genres such as emails, memos, minutes, procedures/policies, disclosures, and marketing materials. Instruction will include not only lecture and large-group instruction supplemented by many specific examples and visual aids, but also interactive in-class writing and peer-review activities, and take-home writing assignments. Real-world writing samples from relevant professional documents will be used throughout.

Instructor Bio

Miles Miniaci is a professor of Upper Division Writing at the University of California, Davis, specializing in Writing in the Professions courses, which include specialized pre-professional courses such as Business Writing, Technical Writing, and Writing in Health Professions. Miles has also taught Composition at California State University, Sacramento and Sacramento City College. He also taught Workplace Writing Skills for the Federal Job Corps Program, working with a variety of professional organizations and vocational training programs.

In addition to his teaching experience, Miles has also worked as a Copy Writer and Marketing Specialist for the California Department of Conservation, and as a Technical Writer for Sacramento County Health and Human Services.

Miles received his MFA from the University of Southern California, his BA from California State University, Sacramento, and his teaching credential from National University.

Agenda

Introductions

- Opening Remarks
- Community Building
- Quotes & Video Presentation
 - David Ogilvy
 - Roman & Raphaelson
 - Steven Pinker

Audience Awareness

- Analysis of an External Communication
 - Before and After Samples
- Proximity to Audience and Tone
- Comparison of Proximity
 - Two Finance-Based Texts
- The Writer's Toolkit

Individual Assignment

- Draft of a Recent Document
 - Reflective Memo

Some Thoughts on Professional Writing

From David Ogilvy's 1982 Memo "How to Write":

"The better you write, the higher you go . . . People who think well, write well. Good writing is not a natural gift. You have to learn to write well. Here are 10 hints:

1. Read the Roman-Raphaelson book on writing. Read it three times.
2. Write the way you talk. Naturally.
3. Use short words, short sentences and short paragraphs.
4. Never use jargon words like *reconceptualize*, *demassification*, *attitudinally*, *judgmentally*, etc.
5. Never write more than two pages on any subject.
6. Check your quotations.
7. Never send a letter or a memo on the day you write it. Read it aloud the next morning — and then edit it.
8. If it is something important, get a colleague to improve it.
9. Before you send your letter or your memo, make sure it is crystal clear what you want the recipient to do.
10. If you want ACTION, don't write. Go and tell the person what you want."

From Roman & Raphaelson's *Writing That Works*:

"The only way some people know you is through your writing. It can be your most frequent point of contact, or your only one, with people important to your career—major customers, senior clients, your own top management. To those women and men, your writing is you. It reveals how your mind works. Is it forceful or fatuous, deft or clumsy, crisp or soggy? Readers who don't know you judge you from the evidence of your writing."

Professional Writing Sample: Before

Microsoft VP Stephen Elop's 2014 email revealing widespread layoffs to employees has become a notorious example of ineffective professional writing.

Here are the first 425 words (about 1 ½ pages) of Mr. Elop's 1,111-word email:

Hello there,

Microsoft's strategy is focused on productivity and our desire to help people "do more." As the Microsoft Devices Group, our role is to light up this strategy for people. We are the team creating the hardware that showcases the finest of Microsoft's digital work and digital life experiences, and we will be the confluence of the best of Microsoft's applications, operating systems and cloud services.

To align with Microsoft's strategy, we plan to focus our efforts. Given the wide range of device experiences, we must concentrate on the areas where we can add the most value. The roots of this company and our future are in productivity and helping people get things done. Our fundamental focus – for phones, Surface, for meetings with devices like PPI, Xbox hardware and new areas of innovation -- is to build on that strength. While our direction in the majority of our teams is largely unchanging, we have had an opportunity to plan carefully about the alignment of phones within Microsoft as the transferring Nokia team continues with its integration process.

It is particularly important to recognize that the role of phones within Microsoft is different than it was within Nokia. Whereas the hardware business of phones within Nokia was an end unto itself, within Microsoft all our devices are intended to embody the finest of Microsoft's digital work and digital life experiences, while accruing value to Microsoft's overall strategy. Our device strategy must reflect Microsoft's strategy and must be accomplished within an appropriate financial envelope. Therefore, we plan to make some changes.

We will be particularly focused on making the market for Windows Phone. In the near term, we plan to drive Windows Phone volume by targeting the more affordable smartphone segments, which are the fastest growing segments of the market, with Lumia. In addition to the portfolio already planned, we plan to deliver additional lower-cost Lumia devices by shifting select future Nokia X designs and products to Windows Phone devices. We expect to make this shift immediately while continuing to sell and support existing Nokia X products.

To win in the higher price segments, we will focus on delivering great breakthrough products in alignment with major milestones ahead from both the Windows team and the Applications and Services Group. We will ensure that the very best experiences and scenarios from across the company will be showcased on our products. We plan to take advantage of innovation from the Windows team, like Universal Windows Apps, to continue to enrich the Windows application ecosystem. And in the lowest price ranges, we plan to run our first phones business for maximum efficiency with a smaller team....

Professional Writing Sample: After

Consultant and leadership expert Jim Morris offered the following alternative to the Elop email.

Compare both documents and note what changed between the two in terms of structure, tone (attitude), topic focus, and sentence-level style and grammar.

All,

Our integration with Nokia gave us great leverage in the device market offset with an unprecedented increase in headcount that, given our new business strategy, is unsustainable. A team of your senior leaders with me principally among them has been working for months on options to navigate around this fact with as little disruption and displacement to our workforce as possible. I regret to say we were unsuccessful in generating a plan to avoid this; over the next six months, we are going to have to lay off approximately 18,000 Microsoft employees.

I cannot express how difficult this decision has been for me, and for everyone involved in it. Our people—each of you—are a critical component of our success strategy. While I am confident that this layoff is absolutely necessary, we know it will result in the corporation losing unprecedented numbers of talented, committed employees, collaborators, colleagues and friends.

We are working on a strategy to provide as soft a landing as possible for those who will be impacted most directly with the layoff. As our plans emerge, we—and by “we” I mean me and our entire leadership team—will do our best to keep you apprised of our progress not only in orchestrating as smooth a downsizing as possible, but also to report on how the sacrifice of those who will be impacted is benefitting the future of the company.

Sincerely,
Stephen

What changed?

Know Your Audience

Choose one professional audience for whom you write frequently. Brainstorm what you know about that audience. Consider:

- Their purpose for reading your documents
- The time frame they commonly have for reading these documents
- Their reading habits
 - Print format?
 - Electronic format?
 - Close reading?
 - Skimming/Scanning?
- Their likely next action after reading your documents
- Their response to you, if any
 - The form of their written response to you, if any

Think of two adjectives that describe the tone you feel would be appropriate for this audience: that is, how would you wish to be viewed by this audience in your communications to them?

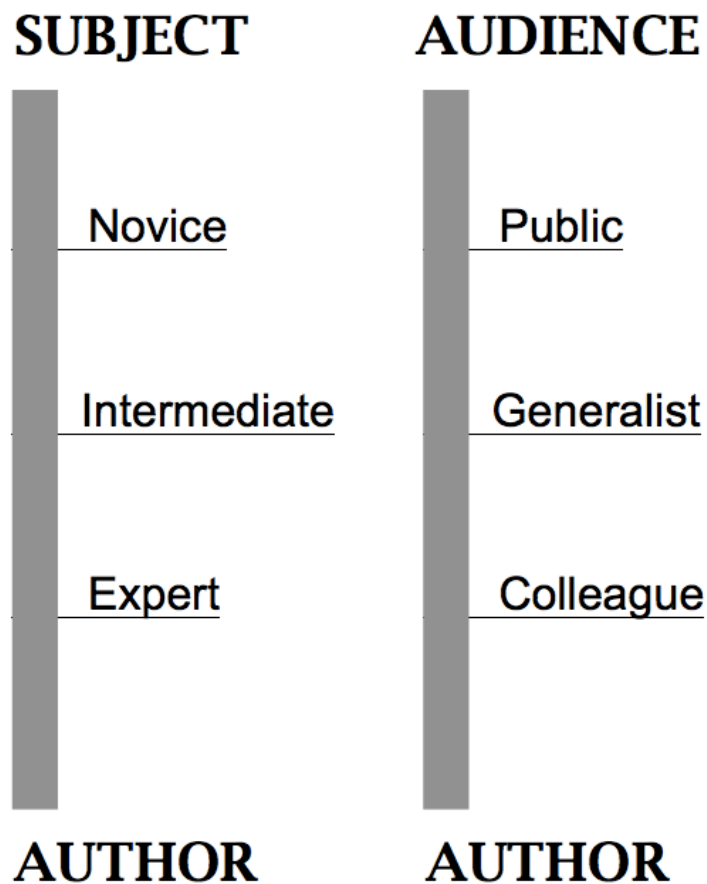
Proximity

Choose a type of professional document you produce frequently, and/or one in which you seek to improve your writing practices.

Using the graphic organizer, represent your proximity to both the subject matter and the audience of that type of document.

Reflect on:

- How well you know the subject matter at hand
- How closely your audience shares that specific content knowledge
- Whether your audience members belong to the same profession or area of specialization that you do

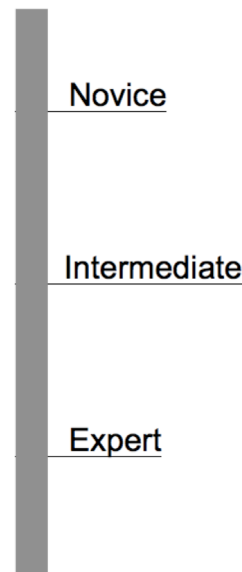


Proximity, cont'd.

Now represent the proximity between author & subject and author & audience for two different versions of the same document.

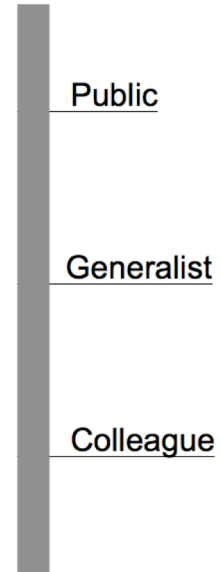
Proposals from the German/French axis in the last few days have heartened risk markets under the assumption that fiscal union anchored by a smaller number of less debt-laden core countries will finally allow the ECB to cap yields in Italy and Spain and encourage private investors to once again reengage Euroland bond markets. To do so, the ECB would have to affirm its intent via language or stepped up daily purchases of peripheral debt on the order of five billion Euros or more. The next few days or weeks will shed more light on the possibility, but bondholders have imposed a "no trust zone" on policymaker flyovers recently. Any plan that involves an "all-in" commitment from the ECB will require a strong hand indeed.

SUBJECT



AUTHOR

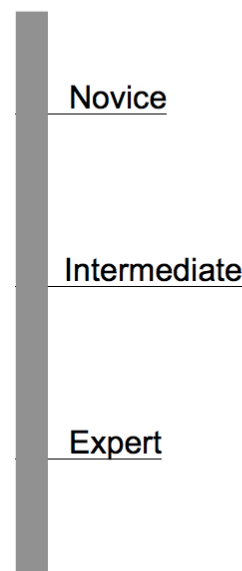
AUDIENCE



AUTHOR

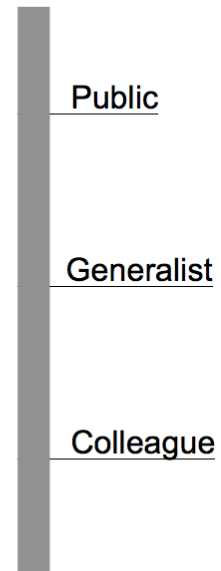
Prices of riskier investments rose in response to recent proposals by German and French leaders, but we are skeptical that this will continue. Investors seem to believe that the proposals will strengthen the euro zone by capping bond yields. This would make euro-zone bonds more attractive to private investors. However, success would require the European Central Bank (ECB) to use strong language or to boost its daily purchases of the troubled countries' debt by at least €5 billion. To convince distrustful investors will require strong action. That may be more than the ECB can achieve.

SUBJECT



AUTHOR

AUDIENCE



AUTHOR

The Writer's Toolkit

A set of common terms can help writers better manage the tools at their disposal to adjust their tone and relationship to readers for different documents and different situations.

Term:

Working Definition:

Essential Questions

When beginning to write, or beginning to plan your writing, always consider five essential questions:

- For whom is this document intended?
- Why would the reader want to read this document?
- What main points is it most important I make?
- By when do any necessary tasks or responses need to be done?
- *If I could convey only one sentence to this reader, what would it be?*

Now brainstorm the answers to these five essential questions about a document you worked on recently or are working on now.

Individual Assignment

Using some of the concepts and terms discussed during the first class session, reflect on a recent piece of your own writing. By 1 pm Monday, 4/10, please:

1. In an email to me at contact@milesminiaci.com, attach a draft of a recent document or draft-in-progress of a document. (All information in such documents will remain confidential, but feel free to omit identifying details if you choose.)
2. In the body of the email, draft a brief (one to two paragraph) reflection memo that focuses on the following issues:
 - The context for writing the document, including your subject, purpose and intended audience
 - Why you chose this particular document to share with me
 - What writing process you used to craft the document or draft
 - Areas of strength you perceive in this document or in your writing in general
 - Areas for improvement for which you'd like to receive feedback, again either in this document or in your writing in general.
3. Also, I'm interested in sharing two or three of the class's responses at the beginning of the next session, so indicate whether or not you'd be comfortable sharing the document and your reflection with the class.

I will only share responses with the class if given specific permission to do so.