CIS 150 Fall 2016

How do you master the art of writing, especially in technical disciplines? The key to gaining proficiency is practice. Practice isn't just sitting down and writing over and over. Effective communication is mastering rhetorical structure—how to build an argument through a process of writing and revision. This course assumes that you've mastered basic grammar and sentence structure and it provides practice in constructing and refining arguments. The complete assignment schedule is to be found on Moodle.

Instructor

Dr. John Cooley

Contact information:

- Office: Exley 347
- Email:
- Office Hours by appointment at:
- Website: Moodle
- Tel:

Meetings:

- Monday, Wednesday 2:50-4:10
- SCIE 189

Each class period, we'll have a writing assignment of some sort. The course schedule is intensive (for me and for you), but since each writing assignment is worth only a few points, you can afford to make mistakes without really affecting your grade. Plan ahead—each class will have an assignment, and no extensions will be given for routine matters. Because everybody involved has other commitments, or because life sometimes intervenes in inconvenient ways, talk to me as soon as conflicts arise.

There aren't any required books for this course, and the readings you'll need will be available on Moodle. You'll also need access to a recent version of Microsoft Word, and if you have a laptop, bring it to class. The bibliography at the end of this document contains a number of references that can help you improve your writing, though they are not required.

Keep in mind there isn't any "right" way to write something—there are just ways that are more persuasive than others. This course is a distillation of my own experience writing and editing—and it's almost certain that for every instance in which I venture an opinion about how to do something, we could, with enough looking, find somebody out there who would have the exact opposite opinion. So in the end, this course doesn't exactly offer a prescription or recipe for how to write; instead, this course is really about training you to take a good, hard look at your own writing and then ask the questions that will help you improve.

Grading

The course is graded in a way that's different from what you are likely familiar with. Most assignments are administered through Moodle and are worth only 10 points—not much, so that you can sharpen your skills to do well on the assignments that are worth more.

The more valuable assignments have to do with creating a project portfolio. These assignments include:

1) A final paper on the "fluctuating asymmetry" topic developed during the semester, worth 25 points.
2) A presentation on your own project, worth 20 points
3) A final paper on a topic of your choosing, worth 100 points
4) A writing portfolio, developed over the course of the semester and including all the materials used to generate items 1-3 above. The portfolio is worth 100 points and is due 12 December.

Your Portfolio: The key assignment of the course.

Whenever you create a substantial written work—a grant application, thesis, or publication—you should keep a "portfolio" of the materials you used to create the work. There are several practical reasons for keeping a portfolio. First, a publisher may require you to demonstrate that the work is your own, and a portfolio is a means of documenting your work. Second, a portfolio allows you to keep your work and your key source documents in one place, in case you need to look something up quickly. Finally, a portfolio allows you to revert your work, in case you decide that you don't like revisions that you've made; you might decide that you want to take your work in a

different direction. In a "paperless office" portfolios are easier than ever to make—just create a folder with the name of your project, and you've started.

The obvious things to put in a project's portfolio include *.pdf versions of the key references (to keep things organized, you might want to create a "references" subfolder), any correspondence related to the project, peer reviews, notes, lists of websites, and drafts. Electronic drafts cost nothing to make, so you should consider making a new draft each time you make substantial revisions or changes. Of course, you'll need to come up with a naming convention to keep things organized. There is no single best way to organize your drafts, but one option is to give them filenames such as **brieftitle_MM_DD_YYYY_Initials.docx**. The "brief title" is descriptive enough that you can remember what the document is (important if you have more than one project going at once!), the date format will allow you to sort the drafts by date, and your initials will remind you of who worked on the document last—important to keep track of if you are doing peer-review or working on a multiauthor project. Note that the title doesn't include dashes, colons, or slashes, and that the only period is before the file suffix. Why? Some operating systems will choke on these characters, so if you share a document with an "illegal" character in the title, your collaborator may not be able to use it.

You'll create a writing portfolio for this course and the plan is to build the portfolios in WesFiles, though that might change. Note that the portfolio is the single most valuable (in terms of points) assignment in this course—because the process underlying the portfolio is the key to good writing. Your portfolio should have sections for:

1) The "fluctuating asymmetry" project developed during the semester.
2) Your project of your own choosing.
3) Other miscellaneous writings and assignments.

Your portfolio should include all the materials you've generated, all peer reviews, etc. for each of these projects, as well as a brief letter explaining the organization and contents of each section in your portfolio. Portfolios will be graded on the basis of organization, completeness, and evidence of substantial work writing and revising your assignments.

Getting help

Stuck? Need help? Ask!

Email is the best way to contact me, but please put "CIS 150" in the subject line to ensure that your message does not get filtered as SPAM. Your success in this course depends on your motivation to make due dates and schedule meetings with me. Students who are more highly motivated tend to do better.

The Writing Workshop has a section of its web site devoted to online writing resources (http://www.wesleyan.edu/writing/workshop/resourcesforstudents.html) and it can also provide one-on-one writing assistance. See http://www.wesleyan.edu/writing/workshop/ for more details.

Students With Disabilities: Students seeking accommodations should contact the office of Disability Resources. For more information, please go to http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/disabilities/.

Additional Expectations

I cannot give "extra-credit" under any circumstances. To do so would be unfair to other students who were not given the same opportunity to gain such credit.

Academic misconduct will result in lowered grades, failure of the course, or other disciplinary actions. You must cite any references used in your written assignments and the papers you submit must be your own original work. Please see the Wesleyan Student Handbook on this topic at: http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/20152016studenthandbook.pdf. If you turn in a paper that you did not write, that is not based on your ideas, or that does not appropriately cite other peoples' work, you will almost certainly fail the course.

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Literature

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Roldan, L. A. and M.-L. Pardue. 2016. Writing in Biology: A Brief Guide. Oxford University Press, New York.

Rougier, N. P., M. Droettboom, and P. E. Bourne. 2014. Ten Simple Rules for Better Figures. PLoS Comput Biol 10:e1003833.

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