COMP 3301: Technical Writing

Contact

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Prerequisites

This course is aimed at upper-level computer science students. I will assume a general familiarity with data structures, software engineering, and technology. At minimum, you will have taken COMP 2401 and COMP 2402 or the equivalents. Moderate programming capability in at least one language is assumed.

Textbooks and Resources

The required textbook for this course is "Writing for Computer Science", by Justin Zobel. You can begin reading this book from the first day of class.

In addition, we will have many assigned readings from the computer science literature, mainly from the Association for Computing Machinery's journal *Communications of the ACM*, sometimes referred to as *CACM*. You may have access to an online version of the journal through a student membership in the ACM, but if not, you have online access through Carleton's institutional subscription to the ACM Digital Library.

Topics

The course's main topics include the following:

- Writing process: how to approach the task of writing; what is involved in writing a long-form document

- Genre: how your approach to writing should vary depending on the audience and the audience's expectations

- Organization: strategies for arranging your content; macro- and micro-level organization

- Grammar: the low-level mechanics of writing

- Clarity: advice for making your writing more understandable

- Scientific Writing: the particulars of this genre

Grading Scheme

Brief writing and editing exercises (intermittent): 20%
Short writing assignments (regular weekly): 40%
Large writing assignments (three in total): 25%
Final exam: 15%

Note that this course will not have a midterm exam.

Assignments and Exercises

Attaining expertise in writing requires practice. In this course, we will undertake numerous short writing exercises, both in class and outside of class. A typical assignment will be to read a designated article from CACM and summarize it in 400-600 words. Assignments will be graded on clarity, readability, and organization. Write from an outline and do at least one round of revisions before submitting.

We will also undertake three longer writing tasks during the term. Each will require approximately 2500-3000 words. A typical longer-form writing assignment will ask for a discussion of a broad question, and you should try to devise an answer and present evidence supporting your stance. At least one of the long writing assignments will have an accompanying programming assignment, in which you write code to address some problem and then analyze the data acquired from running your code.

Important Dates

Sept 8: Classes begin.
Oct 25-29: Fall break, no classes.
Dec 10: Final day of classes – although this is a Friday, it follows a Monday schedule, so we will meet.
Dec 23: End of exam period; take-home exam due.

A Note on LaTeX

LaTeX will be used to format all submissions. While more difficult to use than a WYSIWYG word processor, it produces technical typesetting of unparalleled quality. If you enter graduate school, you will likely be required to use LaTeX, as it is the preeminent tool of technical communication. Even if you have no plans for grad school, familiarity with a markup language is helpful for many technical tools as well.

Academic Accommodation

The following text is from the template at students.carleton.ca/course-outline/.

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

- Pregnancy obligation: Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website.

- Religious obligation: Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website.

- Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation or contact your PMC coordinator to send your instructor your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term. You must also contact the PMC no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your instructor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. For more details, visit the Paul Menton website.

- Survivors of Sexual Violence: As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support.

- Accommodation for Student Activities: Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, see the policy.

Academic Integrity

The following text is from the template at students.carleton.ca/course-outline/.

The University Senate defines plagiarism as "presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as ones own." This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as ones own without proper citation or reference to the original source;

- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;

- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;

- using another's data or research findings;

- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's works and/or failing to use quotation marks;

- handing in substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of "F" for the course.

Academic Integrity in the Faculty of Science

The Faculty of Science takes academic integrity violations seriously; an "F" in the course is standard for a first offense, with more serious penalties possible. Further details about the policies of the Office of the Dean of Science can be found here:

`https://science.carleton.ca/academic-integrity/`