

INSS 2303 CRN 26388

Writing for Security Professionals Asynchronous Online Class – Spring 2022

Instructor: Cindy Storer

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Office hours: Mondays 3-5pm MST

Course Description

Catalog description: The undergraduate writing course addresses specific stylistic requirements and use of lucid prose in order to communicate efficiently and clearly as a security professional. Students use a "learning by doing" model to become skilled at conveying information to national security consumers in writing using both the Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF) paragraph format and the Conclusion Centric report format. Students learn to employ a writing style that is accurate, brief, and coherent.

Security professionals are busy people under a lot of stress, because by the nature of the job, lives and national/state/local security are on the line. They have a high demand for accuracy, completeness, objectivity, relevance, timeliness, clarity and brevity from all written communications. There is no room for political, social, or other “sides” or biases, misinformation, and unsubstantiated opinions. Misunderstandings or failure to provide the needed information can, and on many occasions has, cost lives. The US Intelligence Community has codified these and related requirements as standards in [Intelligence Community Directive 203](#).

This course seeks to prepare you in the basics of this demanding, non-academic, communication style, so you can “hit the ground running”. In addition, once you learn this style, writing in general will become much easier for you, even for your academic courses. You’ll use a “learning by doing” model to learn the Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF) paragraph format and the Conclusion Centric report format while employing the principles of critical thinking (good writing is based on good thinking) and a writing style that is accurate, brief, and clear. You’ll also be reacquainted with the basic rules of grammar, spelling, and syntax. This is critical: basic grammatical and spelling errors can cause the reader to distrust your competence, and therefore undermine your message. This is especially important if the reader, or “customer”, doesn’t want to hear what you have to say, which happens more often than any of us would like.

The course will use James Major’s book, *Communicating with Intelligence: Writing and Briefing for National Security*, as it is the most comprehensive text available on the topic. While working in groups, you will produce a written analysis of North Korea’s Supernotes program and the threat it poses to US national security. You will complete every stage of the intelligence writing process, from initial research through the final written report, as if you were a security professional and I were your supervisor.

Communication

Each week, I will post an announcement on Blackboard reminding you of that week's topic, tasks, and deadlines. I will also post other announcements from time to time. Check Blackboard regularly to make sure you don't miss any important announcements or events noted on the calendar.

For policy reasons, you must use your UTEP email address to communicate with me. Please allow up to 48 hours for me to respond to your email, though I will always respond as soon as I can and usually much sooner.

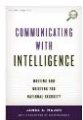
In a seven week course things move quickly, so to ensure that we communicate in time to do you any good:

- In the subject line, include your course number and a brief reference to your issue (e.g., "Late Syllabus Quiz").
- Sign with your full name. Email addresses alone are not enough for me to quickly identify you, nor is just your first name since sometimes there is more than one student with the same name.
- Carefully consider what you need and include any detail in the text that would help me quickly reply without going back and forth. Practice the skills you learn in this course!
- If the issue is complex or you aren't sure exactly what the issue is (for example, if you can only write a vague note but not fully formulate a question or comment), reach out and we can schedule a time to talk.

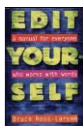
Required text

[James S. Major. *Communicating with Intelligence: Writing and Briefing for National Security*, 2nd Edition. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. May 2014. ISBN-13: 9781442226623.](#)

- This text is available online through the library.
- You may also use the new edition, 2023. That is not available online.



[Bruce Ross-Larson. *Edit Yourself: A Manual for Everyone Who Works with Words*. W.W. Norton & Company. 1996 \(Reissued with new material\). ISBN-10: 0393313263.](#)



William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White. *The Elements of Style*, 4th edition. Longman. July 1999. ISBN-10: 020530902X.



The books listed above are available from the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) bookstore and online from Amazon (www.amazon.com) or other online booksellers. You can purchase or rent used copies of these texts. Additional reading and reference materials will be posted on the course Blackboard course page.

Course Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- RECOGNIZE the tight connection between thought and language, and explain why good analysis and communication are impossible without sharp writing skills;
- DISTINGUISH between writing for security professionals and writing in other intellectual professions;
- EMPLOY accurate, brief, and clear English prose;
- DEMONSTRATE techniques for clear writing and constructive editing;
- APPLY methods and procedures unique to writing and briefing for security professionals;
- WRITE and PRESENT a coherent analysis of a national security issue in a format typically utilized by security professionals; and
- EVALUATE and UNDERSTAND the various audiences for which security professionals write, and the special demands and requirements of each.

Course Requirements

Students must read the assigned materials and submit assignments NLT the associated unit due dates.

- Each student must maintain a high-speed internet connection for the duration of the class in order to access the course website. All course content (except the textbooks) will be accessible via UTEP Blackboard, which can be accessed at <https://my.utep.edu/>.
- Each student must register for a Blackboard account to access the course. Registration requires a valid UTEP email address, which can be accessed at <https://my.utep.edu/>.
- Please note that your professor cannot help you with either of these.

Course Evaluation

Your grade in this course will be based on quizzes, applied writing assignments, and a final paper. The grading criteria for the course is provided below. A detailed course schedule is at the end of the syllabus.

Grading

90 to 100% = A
89 to 80% = B
79 to 70% = C
69 to 60% = D
59% and below = F

Assignments

Description	%Grade	Due
Quizzes	10	Weeks 1-4
Writing Assignments	60	Weeks 1-4
Final Paper (Outline, Draft and finished paper)	30	Week 5, 6
Total	100	

See the Course Schedule at the end of the syllabus for details.

Late Submissions

All activities are due by 11:59 PM MDT on the date noted. If you know you will not be able to meet the deadline – for example, you are traveling to an area with no Internet connection – you must tell me ahead of time. Otherwise, late submissions will be penalized by 10% for each day late after the deadline. If the assignment is more than 3 days late without my permission, no points will be given. In rare, documented circumstances when you communicate to me in a timely manner, for example in the case of an emergency or serious illness, I may allow assignments to be submitted late.

If you have an emergency or unavoidable significant life event that interferes with your coursework, contact me as soon as possible and I will work with you to provide extensions and help as much as I reasonably can.

Required Software

You must have regular access to a computer with the following software installed to work efficiently in this course. Computers in the campus labs should already have the necessary software. These programs may already be installed on your computer.

Adobe Acrobat Reader. You can get the program by going to <http://get.adobe.com/reader/> and clicking on the icon that says “Download Now.” Follow instructions to install the reader.

Word Processing program. I highly recommend that you take advantage of your **free access to Microsoft Office 365** to ensure that all files are compatible with the programs we will use and I can edit them. What’s the point of taking a writing class if your instructor cannot edit your writing! “UTEP has a license for Microsoft Office 365 which allows faculty, staff, and currently enrolled students to install the latest version of Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, OneNote) and its related components (Publisher, Skype for Business) on up to 5 personal computers or Macs, and on Android, iPad, and Windows mobile devices. Office 365 includes OneDrive for Business which provides all UTEP users with unlimited storage. Students can use and download the Office 365 apps through the Microsoft Office Portal.” [Microsoft Office Portal](#)

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty Statement

Cheating is unethical and not acceptable, and will negatively impact or even end your career should you work in the Intelligence Community (and many other fields). One form of cheating, plagiarism, is particularly prevalent in written work. It is defined as using information or original wording in a paper without giving credit to the source of that information or wording. Do not submit work under your own name that you did not do yourself. You may not submit work for this class that you did for another class. **If you are found to be cheating or plagiarizing, you will be subject to disciplinary action, per UTEP catalog policy.** Please see the this websites to learn more about plagiarism and how to avoid it: <https://libguides.utep.edu/c.php?g=430196&p=3854064>.

We will be using Safe Assign, a plagiarism checking tool. “SafeAssign is based on a unique text-matching algorithm capable of detecting exact and inexact matching between a paper and source material. Submissions are compared against the Internet, the ProQuest ABI/Inform database, the Institutional document archives, and the Global Reference Database.”

[Safe Assign Help for Students - Blackboard Website](#)

I prefer to use SafeAssign as a teaching and learning tool, hoping I will never need to have a discussion with anyone about, much less accuse anyone, of plagiarism. Therefore, in Safe Assign, I will turn on the ability for you to see how your writing scores on the plagiarism checker and give you an opportunity to fix it before final submission. You will be afforded three tries, and please note that I will be able to see all of them. I will always grade only the last unless I suspect you are gaming the system, in which

case we will have a talk. So, always do your best the first time and you will be fine, and you will be able to use Safe Assign as a learning tool.

Please note I can also set the percentage of language you can quote from your sources for any assignment. This percentage may change over the course of the semester, so pay attention to the requirements for each assignment on Blackboard.

Disabilities Statement

I will make any reasonable accommodations for students with limitations due to disabilities, including learning disabilities. Please email or call me during the first two weeks of class to discuss any needs you might have. If you have a documented disability and require specific accommodations, you will need to contact the Disabled Student Services Office in the East Union Building, Room 106 within the first two weeks of classes. The Disabled Student Services Office can also be reached in the following ways:

Web: <http://www.utep.edu/dss> E-mail: dss@utep.edu Phone: (915) 747-5148

General Guidelines for Online Courses

Online Learning is not a Spectator Sport. It is everyone's responsibility to participate as fully as they can so everyone can get the most from the experience. Here are some simple rules to follow to make your participation and engagement in the learning process more valuable.

- Ask questions: Professionals ask each other questions before going to their boss (your instructor). If you don't know the answer you are probably not alone, but it is possible that someone in the course does. The HELP board is the forum for asking questions related to content OR any problems you are having.
- Please ensure that you have clearly indicated the subject of your message, preceded by your last name (Example: "Rodriguez, Patriot Act Summary").
- Reach out to others: Offer a fact, article, link or other item that can help others.
- Be appropriate: The online classroom is not the place for insulting or insensitive comments, attacks, or venting. Such language is also unprofessional. Inappropriate behavior will be subject to disciplinary action.
- Be diplomatic: Tolerance and respect of each other's opinions should be upheld, even when strong differences of opinion arise. When sending messages on emotionally charged topics, ensure that they are constructive instead of destructive. Remember, there is a person at the other end.
- Stay focused: Stay on topic to increase the efficiency of your, and everyone else's, learning.
- Avoid using all capital letters. USING ALL CAPS MAKES IT LOOK LIKE YOU'RE SHOUTING! IT'S ALSO MORE DIFFICULT TO READ.

- Avoid using sarcasm in your postings and e-mail messages. Sarcasm does not necessarily translate well in the online world, and you may offend someone accidentally.
- In addition, please see the UTEP [Netiquette Guide for Online Courses](#).

Working in Groups is challenging but rewarding when done well. Here are some tips:

- Communicate early and often with your group through a means the group agrees to.
- Learn and respect the strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes of your groupmates.
- Honor all deadlines.
- Pull your weight – do your assignments as well as you are able.
- Reach out to your group when you need help, and be willing to help others who need it.
- Be honest. Trust is perhaps the most important requirement in any group.
- Seek out your instructor's help as facilitator or coach if the group cannot handle an issue on its own. This will not count against you, but will save you a lot of heartburn and improve your results.

Course Schedule, Due Dates, and Assignments

All assignments are due at 11:59 PM MT. You may want to print this and keep it handy, and/or add these dates to your personal calendars.

Module	Description	Reading	Assignments	%Grade	Due Date
1	BLUF Paragraph Format	Major, Chapters 1, 5	Student Introductions Syllabus Quiz BLUF Quiz Rewrite a Paragraph in BLUF Format	2 2 5	22 January
2	Audience and Topic	Major, Chapter 4 Reading to Write: An Introduction to IC Standards and Style MCIIS Style Guide (reference)	Quiz Rewrite a Paragraph in the BLUF Format	2 8	29 January
3	Accuracy, Brevity, and Clarity	Major, Chapter 4 Ross-Larson, Part I S&W, Chapters I, II, IV	Quiz Exercise Write a Paragraph in the BLUF Format	2 10 10	5 February
4	Conclusion Centric Report Format	How to Write an Executive Summary Major, Chapter 6	Quiz 3 writing exercises	2 9 each = 27	19 February
5	Writing and Publishing	Major, Chapters 8, 9 S&W, Chapter V Ross-Larson, Part II	Final Paper: Topic Sentence Outline Final Paper: First Draft Final Paper	5 10 15	23 February 25 February 4 March