Writing for the Professions

Lecture 1
Introduction to Professional Writing

http://stc.uws.edu.au/wfp/lecture1.ppt

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Some advice before we begin

- Welcome back and congratulations…
- Good writers learn by writing, but they also read a lot too, not literature or trashy novels, but non-fiction – travel, biography, history, manuals, newsletters, magazines, books, & quality journalism.
- How can you write professionally if you do not read professionally?
- Get yourself a portable hard drive (Western Digital; Seagate).
- Get yourself a good computer virus program – Avast; AVG

So what is WFP about?

- Professional writing includes technical, scientific & workplace roles (non-fiction)
- The unit aims to introduce concepts surrounding workplace writing each week such as
  - Audience
  - Layout and Visuals
  - Plain English
  - Reports
  - Ethics
  - Culture
  - Style

What is technical writing?

- In the past Tech Writing = writing for manuals & documents to do with computers and other hardware

- Changing technologies and economics have forced technical writers to wear various hats

- Now: policy writing, web authoring, software development, graphic design

- E.g. Xpedite's Voice Broadcasting
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What is scientific writing?

- Writing that is used to describe scientific processes and report on scientific studies

- Usually uses the jargon of the particular branch of science e.g. biology, psychology, physics, chemistry

- Sometimes uses a limited vocabulary and type of sentence construction

- One idea per sentence/para; extra phrases omitted; precision over emotion

- E.g. Communication Research Lit Review
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What is workplace & non-academic writing?

- Any form of writing produced in a working context; not related to academic writing e.g. peer reviewed articles

- Memos, reports, letters, proposals, submissions, e-mails, instructions, (newsletters, brochures)

- E.g. Power & politics of using writing
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So what are we talking about?

- We are NOT talking about journalism or the so-called creative writing genres
- We are not talking about professionals who write e.g. lawyers, doctors, teachers
- We ARE talking about writing that has several characteristics:
  - 1. clarity, concision, accuracy
  - 2. put to some use, not just enjoyed
- 3. Quite often collaborative not single authored
- 4. Often produced in organisations
- 5. Not sold for money

Creative or boring manuals?

- Professional writing does not have a plot, or characters or a script
- But then again neither does poetry
- Professional writing is most definitely creative just like good non-fiction is creative
- The key element is writing for the needs of your audience

What is writing discourse community?

- The term, 'discourse community' (Swales, 1990) meant a group with shared goals and shared genres, e.g. academic d.c, media, corporate d.c.
- Fallen into disuse within last 10 yrs, now: 'community of practice' 'mutual engagement', 'joint enterprise'
- Why not just use 'audience'?

Audiences are the key

- Analysing your audience then catering for their exact needs

- Never second guess what your audience wants e.g. lecturers

- What does the user already know? Past products, past documentation

- What does the user need to find out? Needs analyses, experts, novices, observation, protocol analysis

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How do you present written information?

- Layout and design guidelines

- Adding visuals means knowing how to edit photos

- Do you know how to create a web page or website?

- What are the rules concerning left-right, top-bottom, fonts, use of colour, contrast, alignment
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Genres of professional writing

- Manuals
- Proposals
- Reports (business, scientific)
- Newsletters
- Brochures
- Catalogues
- Magazines (Open Road)
- Hybrid formats (Part catalogue, part newsletter
- Websites

Plain English – plain language

- What is Plain English?
- Does it work?
- What are the issues with plain English?
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Professional writing & the media

- Media releases
- Press alerts
- Advertorials/Advertising copy
- Websites (some) contain technical/ professional writing
  - online manuals
  - online newsletters
  - online brochures

Ethics of writing

- Issues of copyright
  - What is yours & what is your company's
- Libel & slander: political correctness or infringement of freedom of speech?
  - The case of Andrew Bolt 1 , 2
  - The case of Julia Gillard 1
- Plagiarism and re-usage
- Ethics of good writing e.g. use of quoted email 1

Culture & professional writing

- How do you write for other cultures?

- Some no-no's of writing for an international audience
e.g. different notions of what is a good essay
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How to achieve a good style in your writing

- Use of Joseph M Williams' book: Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity & Grace, Pearson Ed, 2007

- Grammar exercises

- Style exercises

- Revision

- Editing

It's called 'reading'. It's how people install new software into their brains.

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