

THE COMPLETE COURSE IN TECHNICAL/PROFESSIONAL WRITING

Attendees will immediately improve their writing and other communications skills, in turn enhancing their careers and their organization's efficiency and profitability.

The seminars are based on my classes, 'Writing for Environmental Professionals', at the Graduate School of Environmental Science and Management, Duquesne University, and 'Advanced Professional and Technical Writing' at the English Department, Carnegie Mellon University. Syllabi follow:

THE BUILDING BLOCKS delves into each attendee's reasons to become a better writer, then defines 'better' and 'good' writing as clear, concise, and purposeful, and why those traits are important to readers. Related topics include the ten Cosmic Causes of 'good', why empathy with readers is most important and egocentricity is most dangerous, and how empathy affects connect, structure, and tone. Parallel structures, coherence and disunity, active and passive voice, and breathing verbs are explained and demonstrated with examples from engineering and other reports.

MORE BLOCKS FOR YOUR BUILDING introduces ways to become a constructively critical reader, in turn to be a better editor. You'll learn how to recognize and avoid dangling and other misplaced modifiers, pesky pronouns with references that distort meaning, and unnecessary shifts of subject, tense, voice, and number. Then we'll dig into the proper use of bulleted and numbered lists, including how lists can be reversed when appropriate, e.g. when your piece starts to look like an outline. Attendees will evaluate and edit samples of writing from various sources.

STILL MORE ARROWS IN YOUR QUIVER reviews quickly some of the fundamentals presented in BUILDING and MORE BLOCKS, then demonstrates ways to get directly to the point of the piece [and why the point always related to your and readers' purposes]. Related topics include how to: connect thoughts for optimum coherence and clarity, eliminate wordiness, and create abstracts and summaries that entice and inform readers. We'll test your analytical skills with examples of good and terrible writing.

UP YOUR HIT RATE WITH REPORTS, PROPOSALS, AND LETTERS THAT SELL (SOFTLY) begins by discussing communications theory and how it applies to business and the psychology of persuasion. Discussed are techniques for finding the 'hook' that encourages agreement between writers and readers, the win-win essential to persuasion. Addressed also are various structures of documents; footnotes, endnotes, and in-text citations; headlines and subheadlines; and visuals that complement text. Short proposals and reports from engineering companies, and suggested rewrites, are analyzed for clarity, concision, and purposefulness.

THE DEVIL'S LURKING IN THE DETAILS. GRAMMAR, USAGE, AND MECHANICS uses before and after examples from engineering reports and correspondence to demonstrate how punctuation and syntax -- a fancy word for the arrangement of words -- affect meaning, clarity, concision, and purposefulness. Topics include: the components of sentences and paragraphs; the various types and moods of sentences and their applications; transitions to connect thoughts for readers and to smooth prose; the use of commas, semi-colons, colons, and dashes and how their misuse can distort meanings; and how to recognize noun-verb and pronoun-antecedent disagreements and reverse them for clarity. Examples abound throughout.

GO AHEAD; TELL IT LIKE IT IS. CRITICAL READING AND EDITING is guaranteed unconditionally to hone your abilities to recognize 'bad' writing, then to repair and improve it. You'll examine various examples, progressing from relatively simple headlines and sentences to more complex paragraphs and complete letters and reports. A few examples are taken from newspapers and trade magazines; more from letters, reports, and proposals published by various businesses.

JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW surveys major concepts and techniques by grouping them in five cohesive steps: Provoke (know your motives); Prepare (lay the groundwork); Plan (chart your course); Proceed (know the right techniques); and Probe (check for quality). 'Wrong' and 'better' examples of each concept and technique will move you from theory to practice, and demonstrate the importance of each to clarity, concision, and purposefulness.

LET'S LOOK AT YOUR STUFF is your opportunity to submit your most troublesome Issues and documents for constructive analyses by other attendees and me. I often think of this seminar as most useful of all simply because it focuses on and offers various solutions to the problems we all encounter so frequently. You'll probably be surprised to find that your concerns are shared by many other attendees. One big benefit is that you'll discover 'fixes' that you can use the next day and throughout your career; you'll also discover that collaboration can often lead to insights that you couldn't discover on your own, a mind-expanding experience.

THE INSTRUCTOR, Pete Geissler, combines more than 30 years successful experience as a professional writer of engineering, scientific, and business knowledge with 15 years' experience teaching at universities, companies, and associations. He teaches writing at Duquesne University's Graduate School of Environmental Science and Management. He has taught Advanced Professional and Technical Writing at Carnegie Mellon University, and has lectured on writing at the Katz Graduate School of

Business, University of Pittsburgh. Pete has co-authored two books on quality management, one of which became a publisher's best seller, and is a graduate of Duke University.

WHAT OTHERS SAY ABOUT WRITING AND MY CLASSES:

I have said for years that becoming a better writer is critical to your success, regardless of your field and career path, and to the success of your organization. Others agree:

"...[employees] may get by on their technical and quantitative skills for the first couple years out of school. But soon, leadership and communication skills come to the fore in distinguishing the managers whose careers really take off." The Wall Street Journal of September 9, 2002.

"I agree with The Wall Street Journal 100 percent." John Larsen, President Emeritus, New Balance Shoe Company.

"...our ability to use our language will control, to a great extent, the amount of money we will earn during our lives." Earl Nightingale, motivational consultant and lecturer.

"Bad writing costs us dearly... up to one to two percent of sales." Joe Duckett, SNC-Lavalin America, Inc.

"Bad writing sets up the tag games that lower productivity and cost far more than we'll ever admit... I'd estimate up to ten percent of our sales, more than our profit!" Marketing Communications Manager, Fortune 500 company.

"Good communication writing pays in both satisfaction and success. Its rewards far outweigh its achievement costs." Norman Shadle, in 'The Art of Communication'.

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I have been helping students and professionals in various fields to become better writers for almost 20 years. Here are some of their comments:

"Thank you for your excellent presentation. Good marks, teacher." Joan Smith, HR manager, the Cutler Hammer business of Eaton Corporation.

"Terrific, fast-paced, useful, on the mark. What more can I say?" Diana Knepper, training manager, KTA-Tator.

"I really got a lot out of your course, and it shows in my writing. The most useful course I've taken during my six years in college." Graduate student in environmental science and management, Duquesne University.

"Keep up the good work. We will all remember you and your class. I guarantee it!" Graduate student, Carnegie Mellon University.