

**Writing for the Public | EngCmp 0420-1040 | Fall 2015**  
**University of Pittsburgh | MWF 233 David Lawrence 1-1:50pm**

**Box:** <https://pitt.box.com/WFP1040-fall2015>

**Blog:** <https://writingforthepublicpittfall2015.wordpress.com> | #publicwriting

**Instructor:** Moriah L. Purdy | [mlp84@pitt.edu](mailto:mlp84@pitt.edu) | **Twitter:** @moriahlpurdy  
**Drop-in hours:** Cup & Chaucer: Wed 2:00-4:00 | **Office:** Cathedral of Learning 617F

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course explores the theory and practice of writing that serves the public interest. Writing for the public is becoming more and more crucial in just about every sector, though is especially key for individuals working in careers with some aspect of public service (e.g. social justice law, non-profits, journalism, public health, etc.), for those invested in being active citizens as advocates and/or activists, and for those whose creative work is aimed toward a public agenda (e.g. artists, performers, other creative content professionals). Whatever your purpose in learning more about writing for the public, this course will offer you ample opportunities to increase your understanding of the complexities of issues of public interest and to move toward effecting positive change in our world.

As a writing-intensive class, the bulk of your time will be dedicated to practical experience in drafting and revising textual and multi-media genres from the position of an issue of public interest you have a genuine investment in. Through these projects you will come to understand the impact of rhetorical situations on the choices you have with respect to a composition's genre, style, and tone as well as target audience. In your final projects, you will shape the material you've produced into a website/blog of your own design. It is my greatest hope that you will want to continue to work on these websites even after the semester ends. You will practice and prepare for your individual projects by collaborating in the design and execution of a class blog, by keeping extensive research logs, and by sharing and discussing your work with your classmates.

## **GOALS & OBJECTIVES FOR WRITING FOR THE PUBLIC**

Writing for the Public is a writing-intensive course that focuses on helping students learn about and use specific forms of reading and writing that are common in nonprofit and government sectors. It is a core course in Pitt's Public and Professional Writing (PPW) Certificate Program. The course enables students to do the following:

- **Learn how persuasive writing functions in both nonprofit and government contexts.** Students will learn about standards for writing and the range of genres that constitute writing in the public interest, and they will learn how to identify and research public issues.
- **Learn how to engage with the contexts and goals of writing in the public interest,** including ways of satisfying the needs of their readers and what is at stake in writing a document that is published by an agency or nonprofit.
- **Compose sustained arguments supported by research (including interviewing) to persuade a particular audience to take a particular action.** Students will choose a social

issue or problem to research and write about and will narrow their focus to create a project that can be completed during the course.

- **Address the rhetorical and technical challenges of using images, captions, tables, charts, and other design elements to advance an argument and persuade an audience.**
- **Craft language with attention to both style and precision.** The course will allow students to better edit their own writing and to provide useful feedback on their colleagues' writing.

## COURSE MATERIALS

There are no required books for this course. Readings will be provided via PDF or will be linked to library e-books or online sources. Keep in mind that by providing these documents I am operating under educational fair use guidelines for copyrighted material. Please do not distribute.

The University of Pittsburgh provides faculty and students with storage and document sharing via Box, a cloud-storage system like Dropbox or Google Drive. I have set up a shared Box folder as our course management and collaboration site, where you will find course readings, the syllabus, and where you will turn in your assignments digitally. All readings and materials used in-class will be saved to the Box folder. The link to the Box folder is above our course description.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS & PROJECTS

### **Participation/Active Engagement, Preparedness, & Workshops (15% of your final grade)**

*Participation/ Active Engagement:* As a burgeoning public communicator you must listen to others' ideas with attention and respect, and contribute your own ideas with a genuine interest in hearing others' reactions. In this regard, you should consider the in-class and digital environments of this course safe spaces within which to practice public discourse. It's important for me to emphasize that "participation" is more than just speaking up or spamming our digital documents with contributions. What I really look for is *active engagement*. Individuals who are actively engaged take notes ask questions, and demonstrate investment through the body (making eye contact with others, addressing others directly, sitting up straight, etc.) as much (if not more than) as they contribute verbally. If you do not appear engaged I will assume you are unprepared for class.

*Preparedness:* In our detailed schedule I'll provide notes on how to prepare for class. Students who are prepared for class arrive on time having posted all work requested for the day on time to our digital environments and with curiosity and respect for their peers' contributions. Prepared students anticipate sharing their work or asking questions in class and have the relevant work in front of them as soon as class starts.

*Workshops:* Just about every week we will have a writing workshop, where we'll bring examples from the student writing being generated in this class for discussion. The purpose of these workshops is not to critique the examples; rather, the purpose is to learn something by looking at works-in-progress about the challenges (and excitement!) of learning to write for a public. Each workshop will have a particular focus, which will be made clear prior to the request for drafts. Each

student can expect to have their work brought in front of the class at least once (if not twice) over the course of the semester.

### **Commonplace Logs (CPL) and the Research Folder (10% of your final grade)**

The “commonplace book” is a genre of reading log, a place for accruing and indexing passages from the texts you come upon that might be useful to you in a future rhetorical act (the speech, the essay, also the dinner party or casual conversations with peers). It is a genre always geared toward helping the user prepare for public utterance, and this is exactly how you should think of these logs for our purposes. Details on CPLs and the research folders are in our Box folder.

### **Blog Participation (15% of your final grade)**

As a class you will author a publicly accessible blog so that you can get some practice in addressing a public audience and in collaborating with others, as many publicly-oriented projects necessitate. The blog is your publication—my purpose is to look on, give advice, and supervise, but I will not participate as an author. Details on the blog assignment are in our Box folder.

### **Composition Projects (60% of your final grade)**

You will work on several composition projects that are conventional genres for public writing. These projects will culminate in a final project, which will remediate these other projects and deliver them to your public through a website of your own design. Details on these assignments will be made available as needed in our course Box folder.

- Self-Curation Study (5%)
- Project Proposal (5%)
- White Paper (10%)
- Visual Arguments (10%)
- Profile Piece (10%)
- Final Project (20%)

## **HOW YOUR WORK WILL BE EVALUATED**

Your participation and course projects will be evaluated through letter grades and the following numerical equivalents:

- A/95 = Superior Attainment**
- B/85 = Meritorious Attainment**
- C/75 = Adequate Attainment**
- D/65 = Minimal Attainment**
- F/55 = Failure**

I may offer plusses or minuses to reflect movement toward the next level of attainment up or down (+/- 3, so a B+ is an 88, a C- is a 72, etc.).

### **Compositions will be evaluated as follows:**

- **Compositions at the “A” level** exceed expectations. The composer has fulfilled all the necessary requirements of the assignment by making the requirements his or her own, and “running with it.” The composition attends to the task at hand with complexity (attention to

intricacies) and nuance (subtlety and attention to gradations of meaning). With only minor adjustments, A-level compositions could be considered publication-ready, as they address the public audience genuinely and without any signals that the piece was an “assignment.”

- **Compositions at the “B” level** fulfill the necessary requirements with great promise, moving toward attending to complexity and nuance. It is likely, though, that the writer still has some things to figure out, likely in the thinking/ideas, addressing a public audience, and/or in understanding/using the conventions of the genre.
- **Compositions at the “C” level** complete the requirements to an adequate degree, though the work lacks complexity. Requirements may be fulfilled as a check-list not through the work of the composition itself, and/or the sense of audience marks the piece as an assignment.
- **Compositions at the “D” level** are missing requirements entirely, are completed with minimal effort, or represent a misunderstanding of the task at hand.
- **Compositions at the “F” level** are assignments that miss the mark entirely with regard to the requirements for the project and/or have been turned in late (see “Due Dates” below).

*\*\* Note: Missing compositions will receive a zero.*

#### **Participation will be evaluated as follows:**

- **Participation at the “A” level** is reserved for students who are actively engaged in in-class discussion and our digital environments and who contribute with the aim of fostering productive dialogue with their peers. “A” students are always prepared for class, have turned in all drafts and digital contributions in advance of class, and arrive on time.
- **Participation at the “B” level** will be given to students who are actively engaged in class discussion and our digital environments, but who may still be learning to contribute toward the broader conversation (rather than the professor). “B” students treat the subject matter and their peers with curiosity, respect, and enthusiasm and are always prepared for class, have turned in all drafts and digital contributions in advance of class, and arrive on time.
- **Participation at the “C” level** will be given to students who are generally present but rarely contribute unless prompted directly to contribute do so and for whom it is difficult to read their level of engagement. Digital contributions are present but may lack depth or breadth.
- **Participation at the “D” level** is reserved for students who, while present, appear disinterested or bored and who are difficult to work with in group discussions, either in-class or in our digital environments. Such students are frequently late and/or unprepared for class.
- **Participation at the “F” level** is reserved for students who are consistently absent or unprepared, and/or who disrespect his or her peers and thus negatively contribute to our in-class and digital environments.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### **Drop-in Conversations, Scheduled Meetings, & Email**

On Wednesday afternoons (from the end of class until 4pm) I will head to the Hillman library café (the Cup & Chaucer) to make myself available for drop-in conversations/“office” hours. You are welcome to join me individually or in groups for dialogue during this time. If you are not able to meet at this time we can schedule a meeting. In general, scheduled meetings will occur in my office in the Cathedral of Learning (617F). I am also available over email, though before sending me a

message check to see if your concern is answerable via this syllabus or other course documents. I try to keep regular “business hours” and do not typically check for or answer student emails past 5pm.

### **Attendance**

I expect you to attend all class sessions to the best of your ability. If you are aware that you must be absent (if you are sick, have a family emergency, a necessary athletic event, etc.) please be in touch with me as soon as you know you will miss class. See our Detailed Schedule for an update on what we worked on and get notes from a classmate. *Students who miss four or five classes* who have not communicated reasonable circumstances for being absent (in advance of an issue, not after!) will have their final grade lowered by one full letter. *Students who are absent for six or more classes* (barring extenuating circumstances) should not expect to pass this class.

### **Technology**

I prefer to work digitally as much as possible. In-class this means that you will have to either print the readings/your projects or bring a laptop or e-reader/tablet with you to class for discussion and note-taking. I will not provide paper copies. We are also in the great circumstance of being in a high tech classroom, so take advantage of the technology whenever you can. Please use all technology responsibly and know if your laptop/tablet will be a distraction to you. Irresponsible use of technology will result in a lowered participation grade for this course.

### **Due Dates and the “Assignment Dropbox”**

Most assignments will be submitted digitally via Box in a subfolder called “Assignment Dropbox.” Please title documents with your last name and the task so they are easy for me to find. I expect turned in work to be *polished, proofread, and completed to the best of your ability*. This is not an entry-level course, so it is my expectation that you take your writing seriously and give yourself ample time to work on each project (dedicated daily composition time is highly advised).

*Assignments must be turned in by the due date unless you have arranged for an extension (see below). There is no late policy.* Assignments turned in late (either past the initial due date or past the extension date arranged) will automatically receive an “F/55” for that project. Assignments not turned in at all will receive a zero. *Students missing assignments should not expect to pass the class.*

### **Extensions**

I understand that occasionally life circumstances may prevent you from achieving your best work by the due date assigned. Because of this I will generally grant extensions for composition projects (not blogs) if the request is reasonable (e.g. if you realize you need to change the direction of your project, a family emergency interrupted your composition schedule, etc.). Extensions will only be granted once per semester (except in dire circumstances), and should be requested by 5pm the Friday before an assignment is due. New due dates will be scheduled on a case-by-case basis.

### **Revisions**

Work evaluated in the C range or lower may be revised and resubmitted for re-evaluation. *If you would like to do so, you must submit a request to me directly and arrange to meet with me to discuss your plans for revision.* Requests must be made within a week after projects have been returned with feedback.

Revisions should clarify and complicate the ideas of the composition to merit an improved grade (the new grade will replace the old). Revision due dates will be scheduled on a case-by-case basis.

## RESOURCES

### Writing Center

I highly recommend planning for multiple Writing Center sessions, as the tutors in the Center will serve as wonderful early audiences for your work. The Center has provided the following language for instructors to include on syllabi for the University of Pittsburgh:

*Located on the third floor of the O'Hara Student Center, the Writing Center offers events, courses, and one-on-one tutorials for undergraduate students. Although consultants do not correct, edit, or proofread papers, they can teach you strategies for organizing, editing, and revising your writing. You can meet with a consultant once or regularly over the course of the semester. In some cases, your teacher may send you to the Writing Center for help on a particular problem; otherwise, you can seek assistance on your own. Their services are free. You can browse the services they offer or make an appointment by visiting [www.writingcenter.pitt.edu](http://www.writingcenter.pitt.edu).*

### PittServes

It might be that your individual projects created for this course could benefit civic engagement opportunities already in place at Pitt. Pitt's Student Affairs office offers plenty through PittServes, (see <http://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/PittServes>), which describes itself as follows:

*PittServes strives to empower members of the Pitt community to be engaged citizens on campus, off-campus, and globally. PittServes bridges the academic and civic missions of the University by: developing and modeling genuine partnerships with local communities and community organizations with a specific emphasis on reciprocity, transparency, and sustainability; providing training and capacity-building programs for the campus community in areas of civic engagement, community-building, and reflection and sponsoring and supporting a wide variety of civic engagement opportunities for students, including volunteering, internships, and community-based learning.*

### Library

As there will be plenty of independent research for this course please do make use of the library, interlibrary loan, and our liaison librarian for the English Department, Robin Kear, [rlk25@pitt.edu](mailto:rlk25@pitt.edu), 207G Hillman Library. Although a lot of what you'll do is google-able a lot of the historical and theoretical implications of the work you'll do for this class is not, so please do take advantage!

## CAMPUS POLICIES

### Academic Integrity

All students are expected to adhere to the standards of academic honesty. Any student engaged in cheating, plagiarism, or other acts of academic dishonesty would be subject to disciplinary action. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating the University Policy.

## Disability Services

If you have a disability, contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 216 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890/412-383-7355 (TTY) as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

## Statement on Classroom Recording

To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

I like to leave room for readings tailored to current events and/or the interests of our class, as they emerge and evolve. For this reason you'll see some daily assignments are still "to-be-determined." **In our shared Box folder there is a Detailed Schedule where I will make changes, add announcements, and write up instructions for how to prepare for each class, so that schedule will always be the most current.** Major due dates and the general flow of the class is unlikely to change. As you'll see below, on Mondays you will generally hand in assignments and have readings, Wednesdays will be case studies and/or additional reading, and Fridays are reserved for writing workshops.

### WEEK 1: INTRODUCTIONS AND BLOG PREPARATION

Monday, Aug. 31: Syllabus and first project instructions

Wednesday, Sept. 2: Self-curation project brainstorming/cont. introductions.

Friday, Sept. 4: Introductions cont., contributor bios

### WEEK 2: RHETORICAL CONCEPTS AND MORE BLOG PREPARATIONS

*Blog assignments: Group 1 Blogging, Group 2 Other Content, Group 3 Commenting & Circulation*

Monday, Sept. 7: LABOR DAY (no class)

Wednesday, Sept. 9: Read: Bowdon & Scott's "A Rhetorical Toolbox for Technical and Professional Communication".

Friday, Sept. 11: Blog workshop. Post drafts of blog content to your group's Boxnote documents by 11:59pm Thursday evening.

### WEEK 3: SELF-CURATION AND PUBLIC PERSONAS

*Blog entries and other content should be posted to the blog by Sunday at noon. Commenting & Circulating should be completed by class time on Monday.*

Monday, Sept. 14: Read Mehreen Kasana's "Feminisms and the Social Media Sphere" and Reyman's "User Data and the Social Web."

Wednesday, Sept. 16: Case Study: The Thirst Project.

Friday, Sept. 18: Self-Curation Study workshop. Submit drafts to the "Assignment Dropbox" folder by Thursday evening at 11:59pm.

### WEEK 4: DOING RHETORIC AND INQUIRY

*Blog assignments: Group 2 Blogging, Group 3 Other Content, Group 1 Commenting & Circulation*

Monday, Sept. 21: Self-curation Studies due. Read Grabill, “The Work of Rhetoric in the Common Places: An Essay on Rhetorical Methodology”

Wednesday, Sept. 23: Read “Inquiry as Social Action” by Jenny Rice.

Friday, Sept. 25: Blog workshop. Post drafts of blog content to your group’s Boxnote documents by 11:59pm Thursday evening.

### **WEEK 5: PROJECT PROPOSALS**

*Blog entries and other content should be posted to the blog by Sunday at noon. Commenting & Circulating should be completed by class time on Monday.*

Monday, Sept. 28: Read “Rhetorical Community: The Cultural Basis of Genre,” by Carolyn Miller.

Option: “Genre as Social Action,” also by Miller.

Wednesday, Sept. 30: Proposal case studies.

Friday, Oct. 2: Proposal workshop. Post drafts to the “Assignment Dropbox” by Thursday evening at 11:59pm.

### **WEEK 6: EXPLORATORY RESEARCH**

*Blog assignments: Group 3 Blogging, Group 1 Other Content, Group 2 Commenting & Circulation*

Monday, Oct. 5: Project Proposals due.

Wednesday, Oct. 7: TBD

Friday, Oct. 9: Blog workshop. Post drafts of blog content to your group’s Boxnote documents by 11:59pm Thursday evening.

### **WEEK 7: RESEARCH, CONT.**

*Blog entries and other content should be posted to the blog by Sunday at noon. Commenting & Circulating should be completed by class time on Monday.*

*Back-to-back blogging weeks! Group 1 Blogging, Group 2 Other Content, Group 3 Commenting & Circulation*

**Monday, Oct. 12:** Read “Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery,” by Ridolfo & Devoss

**Wednesday, Oct. 14:** Case Study and Guest Speaker, Peggy Paul, freelance cookbook editor and author of the blog Thursday Night Pizza.

**Friday, Oct. 16:** Virtual Blog workshop. **No class (I’ll be at a conference).** Post drafts of blog content to your group’s Boxnote documents by 11:59pm Thursday evening.

### **WEEK 8: WHITE PAPERS**

*Blog entries and other content should be posted to the blog by MONDAY at noon. Commenting & Circulating should be completed by class time on Tuesday.*

**TUESDAY, Oct. 20** (due to Fall Break, Monday Classes meet Tuesday). Guest Speaker, Jessica Farris, advocacy council for ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) of Southern California.

**Wednesday, Oct. 21:** Read “Diagrammatic Writing” by Johanna Drucker

**Friday, Oct. 23:** White Paper workshop. Submit drafts to the “Assignment Dropbox” folder by Thursday evening at 11:59pm.

### **WEEK 9: DISTILLING RESEARCH THROUGH INFOGRAPHICS**

*Blog assignments: Group 2 Blogging, Group 3 Other Content, Group 1 Commenting & Circulation*

**Monday, Oct. 26:** White Papers due. Explore/Read: The Prison Population Forecaster <http://webapp.urban.org/reducing-mass-incarceration/index.html#>, and examples from <http://www.dailyinfographic.com/> and <http://magazine.good.is/infographics> and Read “Ending the Infographic Plague” by Megan McCardle

**Wednesday, Oct. 28:** Play with some infographic-maker apps/programs: <https://infogr.am/>, <https://www.canva.com/create/infographics/>, and <https://venngage.com/>

**Friday, Oct. 30:** Blog workshop. Post drafts of blog content to your group’s Boxnote documents by 11:59pm Thursday evening.

### **WEEK 10: VISUAL ARGUMENTS, CONT.**

*Blog entries and other content should be posted to the blog by Sunday at noon. Commenting & Circulating should be completed by class time on Monday.*

**Monday, Nov. 2:** Case examples, vlogs & video projects. “Road Warriors 360” by Jeff Read, “Message to the World,” by Louis Cole

**Wednesday, Nov. 4:** Case example, Acts of Random Art <http://actsofrandomart.blogspot.com/>, and <https://www.facebook.com/actsofrandomart>, and <http://bloggreyhound.com/traveling-acts-of-random-art-with-sebastian-meade/>  
Work on your visual arguments.

**Friday, Nov. 6:** Visual arguments workshop. Post drafts to the “Assignment Dropbox” by Thursday evening at 11:59pm.

### **WEEK 11: INTERVIEWS**

*Blog assignments: Group 3 Blogging, Group 1 Other Content, Group 2 Commenting & Circulation*

**Monday, Nov. 9:** Visual arguments due.

**Wednesday, Nov. 11:** Read “Tips for Interviewing,” and an additional reading, TBD.

**Friday, Nov. 13:** Blog workshop. Post drafts of blog content to your group’s Boxnote documents by 11:59pm Thursday evening.

### **WEEK 12: PROFILE PIECES**

*Blog entries and other content should be posted to the blog by Sunday at noon. Commenting & Circulating should be completed by class time on Monday.*

**Monday, Nov. 16:** Read “Our Demand is Simple: Stop Killing Us,” by Jay King Caspian, profile piece on Johnetta Elzie and DeRay Mckesson and read “A Young Poet Offers Unblinking Look at his City’s Complexity” by Noble Ingram, profile on poet Derick Ebert.

**Wednesday, Nov. 18:** Readings TBD.

**Friday, Nov. 20:** Profile Piece workshop. Submit drafts to the “Assignment Dropbox” folder by Thursday evening at 11:59pm.

### **WEEK 13: WRITING FOR THE WEB**

Monday, Nov. 23: Profile pieces due. Readings TBD.

*Enjoy your Thanksgiving Break!*

### **WEEKS 14 & 15: WEBSITE PRESENTATIONS/WORSHOPS**

**FINALS WEEK:** Final projects due, date TBD.

**Other Important Dates:**

- Last day to add/drop: Sept. 11
- Fall Break: No class Monday, Oct. 19, Monday classes meet Tuesday, Oct. 20
- Withdrawal requests due to the Deans office: Oct. 23rd
- Thanksgiving week: We will have class Monday, Nov. 23<sup>rd</sup>.
- Undergraduate classes end: Dec. 11
- Finals week: Dec. 14-19

## INFORMATIONAL SURVEY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Academic yr/status: So / Jr / Sr

Major: \_\_\_\_\_

Rank your strengths in order (1,2,3) (so I can put you in blogging groups):

\_\_\_\_\_ visual & conceptual design

\_\_\_\_\_ reflective, personal writing

\_\_\_\_\_ dialogue, social media, circulation

Why did you sign up for this class? \_\_\_\_\_

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What issues of public interest are you already invested in? \_\_\_\_\_

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## CONSENT FORM:

### Consent for Use of Materials in Research and Writing

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (print name) give my permission to Moriah L. Purdy to make use of the work I have done for this course in conference presentations, professional development workshops, articles for publication, or other scholarly pursuits. I understand that my work will be used anonymously and without reference to any of my identifying information.

\_\_\_\_\_ (signature) \_\_\_\_\_ (date)