



## Effective Business Writing —MBA 621—

### Meeting Details

Semester: Fall 2019  
Location: CH 1008  
Meeting Dates: Sept. 7th & Sept. 28th  
Time: 9:00am-4:00pm

### Professor Information

Name: Dr. Daniel P. Richards  
Dept.: English, BAL 5032  
Office Hrs: T+R 12:45pm-2:15pm  
Email: dprichar@odu.edu

### Course Description

Anyone who has spent any amount of time in a business setting knows how important written communication is to the functioning of a successful organization. More than just the oil that keeps the engine running smoothly, effective business writing helps create, maintain, and sustain positive workplace cultures in areas of public relations, interoffice communication, and employee morale—to name just a few. On an individual level, being an effective writer in the workplace allows you to advance in your career in more dynamic and beneficial ways.

The difficult part of this conversation is the fact that many of us have strong feelings of stress, anxiety, and insecurity when it comes to writing. The reasons for these feelings are varied and, to put it bluntly, unimportant. What is important at this stage in your life and career is that you start taking personal responsibility for your writing by reading, studying, and practicing the art. People are not born good writers; good writers work hard and diligently at their art and treat it like any other. This short class represents a step in that direction.

This course is designed to provide students not only with an understanding of communication, specifically written, in business and management settings but also with an open space to cultivate the finer skills associated with becoming an effective business writer. These objectives will be accomplished through (i) exploring rhetorical theory that helps situate our written work and (ii) producing and revising documents that fall within common business writing genres. By the end of the course, students will be able to: analyze written communication through the lens of rhetorical theory; think critically about rhetoric and audience awareness; prepare clear messages using logical arguments and effective organization; and apply principles of design, style, and tone to workplace writing documents.

## Course Texts

Garner, B. A. (2013). *HBR Guide to Better Business Writing*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

Duarte, N. (2010). *HBR Guide to Persuasive Presentations*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

## Email Policy

Given the nature of the course, professional email correspondence is of utmost importance. All emails sent to the instructor must have the following characteristics: pertinent title, appropriate greeting, clear sentences, concise paragraphs, and a signature indicating your full name. I reserve the right to not respond to any email that does not fulfill the above characteristics or that asks questions about the timeliness of grading or information presented clearly presented in the syllabus (you may ask for further clarification). Students should check their email a few times a week if not every day.

## Academic Honesty & Plagiarism

Plagiarism will result in the failure of the assignment and possibly the failure of the course. Students cannot use work completed for credit in previous courses to count towards this course nor can they lift content from any source without proper citation.

## Accommodations

In accordance with university policy, a student who wishes to receive some instructional accommodation should contact the instructor to discuss this accommodation. The instructor must be notified in the first two weeks of the course of any students requiring accommodations. If you have questions about assistance, please contact the Office of Educational Accessibility at 757-683-4655 or visit [odu.edu/educationalaccessibility](http://odu.edu/educationalaccessibility).

## Withdrawal

A syllabus constitutes a contract between the student and the course instructor. Participation in this course indicates your acceptance of its content, requirements, and policies. If you believe that the nature of this course does not meet your interests, needs, or expectations (amount of work involved, class meetings, assignment deadlines, course policies, etc.), you should drop the class by the drop/add deadline, indicated in the ODU Schedule of Classes.

## Schedule

Meeting One	Sept. 7	Readings: <i>Better Business Writing</i> (Sections 1-4) Note: Have book read before first class meeting.
Meeting Two	Sept. 28	Readings: <i>Persuasive Presentations</i> (Sections 1-7) Note: Use book to help plan your presentation.

Each of the two days we will be meeting from 9am-4pm. The time schedule will be:

Segment I	9:00am-10:30am	Segment III	1:15pm-2:45pm
Segment II	10:45am-12:15pm	Segment IV	3:00pm-4:00pm

## Weight Scale & Late Policy

Simplified letter grades will be used for individual assignments: A (95%) Excellent; B (85%) Good; C (75%) Satisfactory; D (65%) Unsatisfactory; F (0%) Incomplete. Late assignments will receive a penalty of a full letter grade per day, including weekends.

## Assignments: Overview

All assignments must be submitted by 11:59pm on the due date indicated. Late work will not be accepted for credit except for in serious circumstances and with documentation.

### 40% In-Class Activities

Students will be given an array of individual and group activities to complete during the two classes. These activities will be aimed at improving students' business writing perspectives and habits.

### 10% Short Business Message | Due: Sept. 21

Students will submit a business message of their choosing that falls under the umbrella of a "short message," which might include an email, a memo, a reference letter, an evaluation, public statement, or other genre falling with the 1-2 pg. range.

### 20% Presentation | Due: Sept. 28

Students will give an individual presentation on a topic that is relevant to business writing for early, mid, or late career professionals.

### 30% Long Business Message | Due: Oct. 12

Students will submit a business message of their choosing that falls under the umbrella of a "long message," which might include an informal report, a proposal, a funding request, a technical manual, or other genre falling with the 4-6 pg. range.

## Assignments: Specifications

Below you will find more detailed descriptions of each assignment.

### In-Class Activities

A significant portion of students' grades will be the completion of in-class activities. These may take the form of free-writes, exercises, group work, reading questions, or something else. Students are responsible for showing evidence of their in-class work by creating a Google Drive folder using their Old Dominion email address. In terms of technical set-up, here is what is required:

- Go to Blackboard. Click on the “Drive Folder” link along the left-hand menu. This will take you to the course folder where you will find resources, papers, slides, and also a sub-folder for “Students” work.
  - Click on the “Students” folder.
  - Go to “New” at the top left of the page and create a new folder. Title your folder such: Last name, first name.
  - In that folder, create two sub-folders: Day 1 and Day 2.
  - In each of the sub-folders, create four sub-folders: Segment I, Segment II, Segment III, and Segment IV. There should be 8 in total: 4 for each day of class.
  - Students will put all of their work in each respective folder to receive credit.
- The content of each of the 8 folders will be worth 5%, for a total of 40% of the final grade.

### Short Business Message | Due: Sept. 21

Students will be given free range to select a short business message that pertains to their industry or workplace of choice. Time will be given during the first day of class to work on drafting and composing this message. The message should be a minimum of one page, single-spaced and a maximum of two pages, single-spaced. The message should be a new message and not derivative of previously composed text. This assignment will be submitted to Blackboard as a single PDF file that contains the following:

- 250-word cover page outlining the audience, purpose, and expectations of the message
- the message itself
- a one-page reflective memo giving a five-point list of the decisions made during the composition of the message

The document must contain all the above elements in the order listed.

## **Presentation** | Due: Sept. 28

It is often said that the best way to learn something is to teach it to somebody else. It is in this spirit that students will be asked to create an oral presentation about a topic relevant to business writing and their peers. A list of suggested topics will be provided; the topic must be specific enough to research and common enough to facilitate engagement. The presentation itself must:

- Include a PPT and a handout
- Be 5-6 minutes in length (penalties applied for this shorter or longer)
- Be professional, informative, and engaging

The presentations will take place during segment III of day two (Sept. 28). That said, the slides must be submitted the night before (Sept. 27 by 11:59pm) so they can be loaded and ready on the day of class. The full submission will include the PPT file as well as a PDF file containing the following:

- 250-word rationale on why the topic was chosen
- one-page handout
- a one-page reflective memo giving a five-point list of the decisions made during the composition of the presentation

Presentations will be given in the reverse order they are received.

## **Long Business Message** | Due: Oct. 12

Students will be given free range to select a long business message that pertains to their industry or workplace of choice. This text will be primarily composed outside of class time, although class time will be given during the second day of class to work on revising the developed text. Students will be expected to apply the principles and best practices outlined in the *Better Business Writing* textbook. The message should be a minimum of four pages, single-spaced and a maximum of six pages, single-spaced. The message should be a new message and not derivative of previously composed text. This assignment will be submitted to Blackboard as a single PDF file that contains the following:

- 250-word cover page outlining the audience, purpose, and expectations of the message
- the message itself
- a one-page reflective memo giving a ten-point list of the decisions made during the composition of the message

The document must contain all the above elements in the order listed.