MEC E 200: Writing Persuasively

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http://www.ualberta.ca/~graves1/index.html
Welcome to the Centre for Writers

We offer free one-on-one writing coaching and support to all students, instructors and staff at the University of Alberta - in any faculty or at any level of study.

Our writing coaches are available to assist clients with higher order concerns in their writing, such as thesis formation, organization and idea development, as well as more specific details, like grammar and documentation style. Clients can bring in any writing project at any stage of development: essays, lab reports, creative pieces, scholarly articles, thesis drafts, application letters - and more. Our coaches will also help students read instructor comments on already-graded papers. ESL and EAL students are welcome!

Request a class room visit by a tutor.

Welcome back for the Fall 2009 term! Tutoring hours will begin on Monday, September 14. The online appointment-booking schedule will be available to clients as soon as possible prior to this date. We look forward to working with you!

http://www.c4w.arts.ualberta.ca/
Genres

As you move through your career at U of A you will need to learn new genres

- Engineering genres: presentations, abstracts, reports

- Genres in course electives: essays, reflections, summaries, annotated bibliographies
A study reported in *Fortune* magazine showed that the top quartile in university studies earned *three times* what the bottom quartile earned in their lifetimes.

The best communicators among you will earn millions more over your lifetimes than the least effective communicators.
No matter how many technical skills you have, you still need to deal with people at a level they can understand, so communication skills are just as important as technical skills. —Paula Anthony, Tech support team leader
Genres for engineering students

- Technical engineering documents
- Email to peers, professors, staff
- Job application materials
- Essays for non-engineering courses
- Lab reports for science courses
Audiences

You will need to learn to write for distinctly different audiences:

- Co-workers in co-op placements
- Engineering professors
- Professors in elective courses
- Job search documents
Purposes

- Writing that focuses on instrumental discourse (discourse that aims to do something)
  - E.g. computer manuals (print and help screens)
  - Assembly instructions for toys, appliances, games
  - Research articles
The circular model

- Highlights the dual aims of discourse
- A piece of writing can both persuade and inform (e.g. newspaper report on school lunches)
- Any piece of writing has at least two aims
- E.g. Your resume
  - Informative and persuasive
5 Factors affecting success

1. Flexibility of your **writing processes**
2. Ability to get **feedback** on drafts
3. Familiarity with the **genre**, complexity of the genre
4. Complexity of the task (**purpose**): description is less complex than analysis/synthesis
5. Number of **audiences/readers**, diversity within these groups
1. **writing processes**—worksheets *(planned for)*
2. **feedback** on drafts—Abstract feedback template, C4W *(available, planned for)*
3. Familiarity with the **genre**—how many of these have you written this term? *(unknown)*
4. Complexity of the task *(purpose)*: analysis/synthesis is at top end of reasoning skills *(difficult)*
5. **audiences/readers**—instructor *(relatively easy)*
Audience and Purpose

- Understand your audience for a piece of writing
- Understand your purpose for a piece of writing
- The better you understand your audience and purpose, the better your document will accomplish your goals
Purposes in this paper

- Outline the issue at hand
- Propose a solution based on one ethical principle
- convince the reader that the application of this ethical theory would prevent future occurrences of this kind
Drafting the paper

Launch:
- Utilitarian argument suggests that the greater good for society would be served by launching

Abort launch:
- Overall safety of the astronaut is more important that meeting deadlines—Kant argues that the acts that lead to results are just as important to creating a moral society
Informal Argument and Academic Writing

Ex. [this study] will be a unique scholarly contribution as very few studies genuinely combine oral history and the documentary record.

Claim → Link (because) → Reason

Challenges (How, So what, Why?)

Evidence (Data, Statistics, Expert opinion, Visuals, Other studies, etc. [What counts is often discipline-specific])
Challenges/rebuttal

If you are in favor of launching, how can you anticipate arguments against your position? As you rebut those arguments, you make your own position stronger.

- Arguments against:
- Arguments for launch:
Best evidence in engineering

- What is the strongest evidence in an engineering context like this?
- Statistics?
- Downside risk?
- Credibility/past record of success?
- Logic?
- Emotion?
Part 1: Explication of philosophical principle

- 1. Utilitarianism - John Stuart Mill
- 2. Virtue Ethics – Aristotle
- 3. Formalism – Immanuel Kant
Part 2: Ethical dilemma explained and “solved”

- Data suggesting the launch will not succeed
- Some knew it, but they didn’t get their message through
- Management ended up hitting the impending deadline with efficiency—a practical decision, but not a good ethical decision
- NASA management—made decision with info on hand; engineers were ignored and their perspective not passed on
Solved—ethical position

- Evidence doesn’t support a no launch position, so there is no evidence to support a no launch decision.
- Contractarianism holds that if the process is fair, then the outcome must be just/fair—original, new. Decisions must be based on evidence rather than on emotion.
- In the case of the launch of the Challenger, the decision process was flawed...
Looking ahead

- Use the C4W as a resource to get feedback before handing in final drafts
- Work hard at developing broad writing skills to handle the challenges of writing at work and in academic settings