

Biomedical Writing

VIBS 310— Fall 2019

VIDI 104

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Office hours: Whenever my door is open or by appointment. **To set up an appointment, first consult the link on the eCampus course homepage.** If none of the times listed there work, then please email me to see what other times I might be available.

Syllabus & Course Policies

Welcome to VIBS 310! Obviously, this is a writing course, and we will spend a lot of time working on the mechanics of writing. In particular, we are going to focus on technical writing, exploring the ways scientists communicate their findings to one another and the ways that information is subsequently translated to the public. An organizing principle underlying the entire course will be a philosophical question. Namely, how do we know what we know? This may seem like an odd question to be asking in a writing course. As our class discussions will reveal, however, it is absolutely foundational. In fact, many of the conventions of science writing, particularly for a scientific audience, seem arbitrary and even weird until you understand science as a knowledge-generating enterprise that relies not only on reliable communication but also on efficient information storage and retrieval.

Two additional major themes will run throughout our discussions. First, writing is an act of communication. In the throes of a writing project, it is all too easy to lose sight of this basic principle. Returning to the fundamental questions of what it is you are trying to communicate, to whom, and for what purpose is often the key to reining in a writing project that has run wild or to spur a stubborn passage that simply refuses to budge. Second, writing is a process, not a product. Somewhere in the educational system, this simple truth gets lost. Students most often interact with writing in the form of textbooks, magazines, newspapers, journal articles, websites, etc. However, all of these represent final drafts. Students rarely get to see the outlines, rough drafts, editorial notes and countless revisions that preceded the polished product that eventually made its way to the marketplace. This often creates anxiety and unreasonable expectations for beginning writers who mistakenly believe the first words on the page must be perfect. In reality, brainstorming, planning, reviewing and revisions are just as much a part of writing as final publication.

Learning Objectives

Application of these foundational themes will help you communicate more effectively. In particular, the activities and assignments in VIBS 310 should help you:

- Strengthen and refine your writing skills
- Become more effective in communicating complex, scientific information
- Improve your research skills
- Enhance your analytical and editorial skills

Expectations

Participation is an important part of the learning process in VIBS 310. Class time will be spent discussing readings, completing group tasks, giving feedback, etc. Time outside class will be spent reviewing your peers' work, researching, reading, writing, etc. As such, you are expected to attend class, to arrive on time, to complete reading assignments *before* coming to class, to participate in discussions, to provide your peers with thoughtful feedback, and to turn in assignments on time.

Grading

This course as a whole will be graded satisfactory/unsatisfactory. Individual writing assignments, however, will be graded according to the following scale:

A	90-100	Outstanding work, strong in both content and mechanics
B	80-89	Good work, requiring minor revisions in either content or mechanics
C	70-79	Adequate work, requiring moderate revision in content and/or mechanics
D	60-69	Unsatisfactory work, requiring extensive revisions
F	<60	Unacceptable work

To receive a satisfactory grade for VIBS 310, you will need to have an overall average of at least 70 *and* a grade of at least 70 on the capstone assignment, the literature review. Contributions to your final grade and *tentative* due dates are as follows:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Draft</u>	<u>Peer Reviews</u>	<u>Final</u>	<u>Weight</u>
Great Paper Chase	---	---	9/3	5%
Abstract	9/10	9/17	9/24	15%
Memo/Annotated Bibliography	10/1	10/15	10/22	25%
Literature Review	11/5	11/19	11/26	35%
Peer Reviews				10%
Rough Drafts				10%

Late Policy

Assignments, except The Great Paper Chase, must be turned in by 11:59 pm Central Time on the day they are due. *Due to technical constraints, the deadlines for peer reviews cannot be extended for any reason.* For all other assignments, failure to meet the deadline without a university approved excuse will result in a deduction of 10% of the assignment's total value for each day beyond the due date. In other words, turning in a 100 point assignment two days late will result in a 20 point deduction. Turning in a 10 point assignment three days late will result in a 3 point deduction. In the case an assignment is not turned in due to a university approved excuse, the instructor and student will negotiate an appropriate way to make up the work.

Peer Review

As mentioned above, writing is a process. For each writing assignment, you will turn in a preliminary draft. The grade for this draft will be based entirely on turning it in on time. However, it will be reviewed both by your teaching assistant and by your peers. This is a vital part of the writing process, and it depends not only on taking your role as a peer reviewer seriously but also on completing peer reviews on time. Your peer reviews for the semester will be evaluated for the quality of your feedback, and this will count 10% toward your final course grade.

Attendance Policy

Attendance in VIBS 310 is mandatory. Each unexcused absence will result in a 5 point reduction to the final course grade. *It is your responsibility to sign the attendance sheet each week.* If you find a discrepancy in your attendance record, you need to bring that to the instructor's attention within one week. Students with a university excused absence should contact the instructor as soon as possible so arrangements can be made to make up any missed activities or in class work.

Academic Integrity Statement

As the Aggie Honor Code states, "An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do." It is expected that you will neither give nor receive unauthorized aid on work in this course. All writing for this course must be your original work. For Texas A&M Honor Council Rules and Procedures, please see <http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu>.

Counseling & Psychological Services

If you find yourself in a crisis situation you may go to the Student Counseling Service (979.845.4427) for crisis intervention anytime during business hours, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday. After 4 pm or on weekends, you may call the HelpLine at 979.845.2700 (V/TTY), or go to the nearest hospital emergency room. For more information, please visit <https://caps.tamu.edu/>.

The Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services at White Creek or call 845-1637. For additional information visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>.