

WRT 334: SCIENCE WRITING

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Office hours: Tuesdays 2-3pm, Coastal Institute Kingston Rm. 109

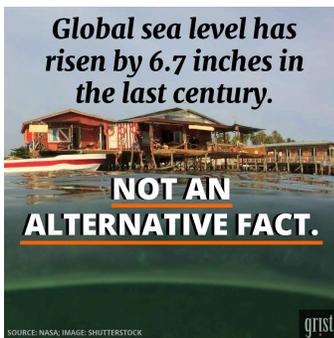
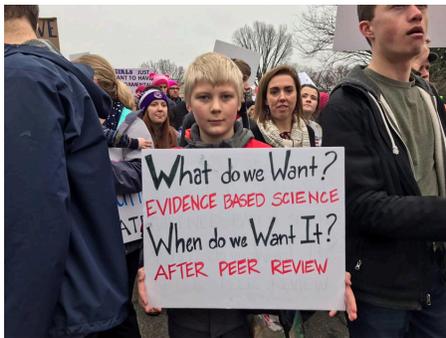


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Course Description

If you've turned on the television or glanced at any online forum in the last week, you know that a fierce debate has ignited about "alternative facts." Late January also brought us deep cuts to funding programs from the US Environmental Protection Agency; temporary and ongoing blackouts of social media communication from the US Department of the Interior, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and the United States Department of Agriculture; and the elimination of mentions of climate change from the White House web site (as of the first day of this semester). In short, at few times has it been more important to consider the enmeshed roles of science, writing, communication, and public engagement in American life. As future scientists, it's your responsibility to make sense of what your discipline is, what it values, how it persuades, how it peer reviews, and how it creates what we call "science," through people working and writing together in daily practice.

My goal here is not for you to learn some writing tips and tricks so that you can more easily persuade "uninformed" audiences to "listen up!" to "Science." Instead, I hope we can work together to consider how "science" develops over time, through people and practice, and is continually subject to revision. And that it's also *defensible*.

In WRT 334, Science Writing, we'll equip you to engage in these increasingly urgent conversations by working to improve both your academic and your public writing. Through rich conversations about the disciplines of writing and rhetoric, regular practice writing across a variety of genres, periodic opportunities to present in front of the class, multiple chances to collaborate with fellow classmates, and frequent revision with peers, you should become a stronger and more confident writer. This is not a class that focuses heavily on mechanics and grammar. Instead, it is a class about rhetoric and writing, meant to get us thinking and talking about what science writing—and science!—is all about: how it functions, brings groups together, has particular expectations, solves certain problems, and emerges out of certain exigencies. Once you learn those lessons, you can face any scientific writing challenge with more confidence, inside the classroom or out. You should also feel more equipped to become an active participant in American civic life.

Through this class, students will:

- Recognize scientific disciplines as communities of people held together through common language and practices.
- Practice writing habitually, including frequent writing and constant revision.
- Practice communicating complex science to colleagues, funders, and members of the public across multiple genres.
- Practice offering and asking for useful peer feedback on writing.
- Demonstrate less anxiety and more confidence about writing.

Requirements:

- Come prepared for class. This means completing (and taking notes on) all readings and bringing those readings to class, as well as paper copies of any writing assignments.
- Actively participate in all activities.
- Treat each other with respect in the classroom and out.
- Attend class regularly. Students shouldn't miss more than two course periods per semester.
- Write! Whether you feel like it or not. Whether you're happy with the results or not. Just write.

Materials:

- Access to <<http://seacomm.weebly.com/wrt-334.html>> for all readings (via pdf)
- A notebook for notes and in-class writing activities
- Access to a printer for major and minor writing projects

Projects and final grade distribution (project descriptions below)

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|---|-----|
| Writing Project 1, "How Does Science Persuade?" (Individual paper) | 25% |
| Writing Project 2, "How Can You Enter a Scientific Discourse Community?" (Individual paper) | 25% |
| Writing Project 3, "What Counts as Science?" (Group presentation) | 25% |
| Writing Project 4, "Why Does Your Science Matter?" (Group interview + profile) | 25% |

URI Grading Scale

A 93 / A- 90 / B+ 87 / B 83 / B- 80 / C+ 77 / C 73 / C- 70 / D+ 67 / D 63

Class Procedures and Important Information

Attendance and Participation: The small-class environment of Writing & Rhetoric courses makes dedicated attendance and full participation the responsibility of each and every class member. Students who miss classes are responsible for getting the assignments from a fellow classmate – not from the professor. *If students notify the instructor in advance*, absences for religious holidays, athletic participation, or other university-sanctioned events are excused. Each student is allowed to miss two class periods (though any assignments due that day are still due prior to the start of class). Be smart about this! Save your free absences for days you are very, very sick or stuck in New Jersey.

Deadlines and Due Dates: All assigned work is due at the beginning of the class meeting on the date specified. Unless negotiated in advance for extenuating circumstances, late work will not be accepted. If you will be missing class for some reason on a due date, submit the assignment via email prior to class.

Academic Honesty: You need to understand plagiarism and its consequences. Please consult the *URI Student Handbook* about academic honesty and related issues. The penalty for plagiarism is a zero for the assignment and a report to your academic dean, who has the option to fail you for the course; in

addition, the charge of academic dishonesty will go on your record in the Office of Student Life. Many text and online resources offer extensive help on matters of plagiarism and how to acknowledge source material. If you need more help understanding when to cite something or how to make clear your references, PLEASE ASK. It's always better to be safe than sorry.

Courtesy: If you must come in late, please do not disrupt the class. Please put away all laptops, cell phones, iPhones, etc. except when explicitly approved for an in-class activity.

The Writing Center: The Writing Center serves *all writers, all disciplines, all levels, all stages of writing*. If possible, call ahead for an appointment at 401-874-4690. Drop-in tutorials are often available. The Writing Center is located on the 4th floor of Roosevelt Hall. You should go there! It's great.

THE HUB@LLRC: The Hub at the Language Learning Resource Center is a place where students and faculty can go to get just-in-time support for a wide variety of media and technology projects. Located on the third floor of Swan Hall, you can learn where to get access to a range of digital resources, including iPads, laptops, video cameras, audio equipment and other technology. In the lab, you can work on projects with help from a team of student workers. <http://www.uri.edu/harrington/hub>

Disability Accommodation: If you have a disability that would impact your work in this class, please contact me at the beginning of the semester so that reasonable accommodations may be worked out to support your success in this course. You should also contact Disability Services, 330 Memorial Union or 401-874-2098 for additional support and resources.

Respect and Inclusion: I am committed to fostering a shared community that views the various forms of diversity we bring to the classroom as our greatest resources: differences of gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, culture, and religion, among others. I expect students to be relentlessly kind in their criticisms and open to learning from the perspectives of others. I am committed to using your preferred name and pronouns. Rather than calling roll on the first day, I invite students to introduce themselves with their preferred names, and you should feel free to include your preferred pronouns then or to more discreetly speak with me after class or contact me via email. If your preferred name or pronouns change during the semester, please let me know and we can develop a plan to share this information with others in a way that is safe for you.

NOTES

WRITING PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

WRITING PROJECT 1, "HOW DOES SCIENCE PERSUADE?" / RHETORICAL ANALYSIS (25%)

Tuesday, January 31: Introduce Project

Thursday, February 9: Peer workshop #1

Thursday, February 16: Peer workshop #2

Tuesday, February 21: Final draft due

Writing project one invites you to select one academic journal article from your scientific discipline and create a rhetorical analysis of that article. You're probably used to reading and writing about scientific journal articles by focusing on their scientific content. This project asks you to focus on that, in part, but also to largely focus on the rhetorical moves the article makes. What choices of organization and style do the authors make? What are the article's main arguments and how are they supported? Who is the audience of the article, how can you tell, and what appeals do the authors make to this specific audience? This writing project invites you to engage with your discipline through an intense focus on a single piece of writing. How does the author use science and writing to craft a persuasive argument?

WRITING PROJECT 2, "HOW CAN YOU ENTER A SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE COMMUNITY?" / INSTRUCTION GUIDE (25%)

Tuesday, February 21: Introduce project

Thursday, March 2: Peer workshop #1

Thursday, March 9: Peer workshop #2

Tuesday, March 14: Final draft due

Writing project two builds directly from writing project one, asking you to select at least five additional articles *from the same academic journal you selected for writing project one* in order to analyze the communication practices of the discourse community it represents and determine how someone could enter its conversation. You are seeking answers to questions like: Who is the audience for this journal? How do they expect you to speak? On what topics? This project should equip you with tools you need to understand particular writing opportunities, whether those be academic journals or future papers, dissertations, or funding proposals. After analyzing the scientific journal, you will write up an instruction guide for scientists interested in publishing in the journal by capturing the journal's personality and style.

WRITING PROJECT 3, "WHAT COUNTS AS SCIENCE?" / GROUP PRESENTATION (25%)

Tuesday, March 21: Introduce project

Thursday, March 30: Peer workshop

Tuesday, April 4 and Thursday, April 6: Group presentations

Writing project three isn't a writing project at all! Instead, you'll take the work you completed for writing project two and team up with a group of students in related disciplines. Comparing, contrasting, and synthesizing what you uncovered in writing project two (and one!), you'll co-create a short group presentation that answers our guiding question for your particular discipline: What counts as science?

WRITING PROJECT 4, "WHY DOES YOUR SCIENCE MATTER?" / RESEARCHER PROFILE (25%)

Tuesday, April 11: Introduce project

Thursday, April 20: Peer workshop

Thursday, May 4: Final draft due

Writing project four keeps you in your groups from writing project three to interview and then co-write a profile of a Ph.D. student fellows from the SciWrite@URI rhetorical training program for graduate students and faculty here at URI. Your group will be paired up with a SciWrite@URI fellow who has a parallel background to your interests. Each group will work together to draft strong interview questions, interview the SciWrite@URI fellow, and draft the final profile. If you do a good job—and I know you will!—these profiles will be posted to the SciWrite@URI web site to promote the work of the fellows.