

WRT 533: Graduate Writing in the Life Sciences, Fall 2016
T/Th 12:30-1:45pm in 117a Coastal Institute
Dr. Caroline Gottschalk Druschke
Depts. of Writing & Rhetoric and Natural Resources Science
Office: 109 Coastal Institute, by appt.

At the 2015 “Science for Parks, Parks for Science: The Next Century” Summit at UC Berkeley, world-renowned marine ecologist and keynote speaker Jane Lubchenco was emphatic in her pronouncement: “Scientists need to learn how to be bilingual. We need to learn the language of science and learn the language of laypeople.” To date, scientists may receive some training in the language of science for discipline-specific research writing including proposals, theses, and manuscripts. But they typically receive little training, if any, in the language of laypeople and in communicating across multiple academic and non-academic audiences. This inadequate training continues even though research shows that scientist engagement with the public fosters greater public trust in the sciences. This trust leads to more compelling and more accessible scientific information being conveyed to a broader spectrum of society, and more effective incorporation of science into social and environmental policy making. Thus, there are clear and compelling reasons why scientists should “learn the language of laypeople.”

A primary tenet of this class is that training graduate students to be “bilingual” in this sense creates future scientists who are *both* more effective science communicators *and* more effective scientists.

In WRT 533, Graduate Writing in the Life Sciences, we will work together to make you bilingual (even better: *multilingual*, even *translingual!*): improving 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, and frequent revision with peers, you should become a stronger and more confident writer in just 14 weeks. 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 writing 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 should be able to face any writing challenge with more confidence, inside the classroom or out.

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:

- *The Little Seagull Handbook* for basic reference (available at the URI Bookstore for WRT 104/106)
- Access to <<http://seacomm.weebly.com/wrt-533.html>> for all other readings (via pdf)
- A notebook for notes and in-class writing activities
- Access to a printer for major and minor writing projects

Major projects and grading breakdown:

- Active participation, engagement, peer workshopping, and completion of daily work (10%)
- WP1: Academic forum analysis (20%)
- WP2: Critique of public science writing (20%)
- WP3: Public science writing about your own (or your lab's) research for a live audience (20%)
- WP4: NSF "Personal, Relevant Background and Future Goals Statement" (20%) with reflective cover letter (10%)

WP1: Academic forum analysis (5 pgs. double spaced)

Peer workshop one, Thursday, October 6

Peer workshop two, Thursday, October 13

Final draft due, Tuesday, October 18

This project asks you to investigate and analyze an academic journal (forum) that you might want to submit work to in the future. After identifying a particular forum, you'll describe the communication practices of the discourse community it represents and determine how to enter its conversation. You are seeking answers to questions like: Who is the audience for this journal? How do they expect me to speak? On what topics? This project should equip you with tools you need to understand particular writing opportunities, whether those be academic journals, dissertations, or funding proposals.

WP2: Critique of public science writing (5 pgs. double spaced)

Peer workshop one, Thursday, October 27

Peer workshop two, Tuesday, November 1

Final draft due Thursday, November 3

For this project, you will analyze the public accommodation (sometimes called a translation) of a piece of scientific research. You will locate a popular or non-technical report of a scientific finding, discovery, or announcement and compare it with the corresponding academic journal article, critiquing how well it succeeds at explaining the science in question for its audience. Your ultimate goal is to consider how—and why—academic discourse differs from popular discourse. This project will help prepare you to do your own accommodation in project three.

WP3: Public writing about your own (or your lab's) research for a public audience (varies by forum)

Peer workshop one, Thursday, November 17

Peer workshop two, Tuesday, November 22

Peer workshop three, Wednesday, November 23 - Monday, November 28 (via email)

Final draft due Tuesday, November 29 (and submit to public venue)

This time, you need to craft your own public accommodation of your research (or of research being conducted in your lab). You will need to select a relevant forum, consider your audience, and take on the difficult task of translating your science into terms that the general public can understand. You'll need to prioritize what's most important for your audience to know, consider how to tell a compelling story from the data, and find clear and accurate ways to explain complex scientific terms. The ability to translate complex science to public audiences is an essential skill for 21st century scientists and will help you to better understand the societal stakes of your work.

WP4: "Personal, Relevant Background and Future Goals Statement" with Reflective Cover Letter

(3 pgs. single spaced [statement] and 2 pgs. single spaced [cover letter])

Peer workshop one, Tuesday, December 6

Final draft due Thursday, December 15

For this final project, you will prepare a component of the application for the National Science Foundation's Graduate Research Fellowship Program, the "Personal, Relevant background and Future Goals Statement." In it, you will describe your personal, educational and/or professional experiences that motivate your decision to pursue advanced study in science, including specific examples of research and professional activities. This is your chance to show off the skills you've developed this semester by writing clear and compelling, evidence-based prose that integrates personal and professional experience and interests. In addition to this statement, you will prepare a cover letter that introduces the project and points to your growth as a writer over the course of the semester.