English 210E
Technical Writing - On-line

Fall 1995

Instructor: P. Beam

Folks, this will be the first e-mail message to the 210E: Tech Writing online class -- on-campus and distance-ed. It contains information on class procedures and requirements. Please comment as it applies to your area. I plan to send it as soon as the course e-mail or announcement functions are available -- possibly later today. Sections of the course materials are being implemented over the next few days and we’re on schedule in all areas.

The course url for easy connection is listed 4 lines below.

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210E URL:http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/ENGL/courses/engl210e/index.html

Subject: English 210E -- Technical Writing on the World Wide Web

Welcome to all 210E Students from Paul Beam, Peter Goldsworthy and the course support group!

This first e-mail message introduces you to our system of communication for English 210E. In addition to e-mail messages, we also have the benefit of newsgroups and VUW-MOO for communicating with each other. Please feel free to make contacts among yourselves through these communication tools.

Throughout the next four months plan to incorporate regular e-mail and announcements from the home page location "Instructor news" into your routine -- it is the mode of communication we will use to distribute important information to you.
Please rely on the course files and announcements as the official sources for assignment information and any changes to how we proceed.

>From time to time we will make changes to modules and tutorials and we will announce these, so you don't look at a display one day and then find a very different structure there the next. Many course links will make associations among the modules/tutorials/tools easier to follow and to use.

We will encounter some unanticipatable problems -- and others we've known we'll face -- and we ask for your patience and good will. We'll resolve those we can as quickly as possible and tell you honestly about those we can't, or which we can address only in part. Where we have to make accommodations, we'll do so in your best interests and as early as we know to do so. We'll appreciate your tactful, supportive comments about errors, omissions, contradictions among the various modules and tools and the instructions we've provided on integrating them. The course will build and improve even as we proceed, but you'll be pioneers in its first offering.

Please remember that there are over 150 of us. You'll discover soon how long e-mail can take to read, consider and respond to. Please don't inundate us with e-mail. As you discover a problem, let us know and we'll announce it asap, so all of you don't have send a note. All of the instructor group, except for Peter, Daniel and yours truly, are volunteers; many are students like yourselves, or folk at work and off campus. Please be patient with us. We'll respond as quickly as we can. You can help by keeping msgs politely brief, looking first to see if your question is answered in the course materials and checking to see that you're asking the right person for help in his or her area. Parts of my mail will be read by Daniel and Peter and the appropriate person will respond as needed.

Another good way to help is to make your reason for writing clear in the 'Subject' line of the e-mail, like "Can't find assignment folder", or "My partners' e-mail don't work" so we can prioritize our responses to treat emergencies first. I'd like to havee many of our interchanges on e-mail and the course announcement levels work like announcements in class. Remember, be polite to all other members; computers keep records.
Please read the course instructions and outlines at the start of the bookshelf. These will familiarize you with what we're trying to do, what tools you have to work with and how the course is structured. Many questions are answered there too.

We're very proud of the course having 'different voices.' It has been prepared by a wide variety of people, with very different backgrounds -- a group rather like yourselves! I have encouraged individuals to prepare materials in their own ways, with their own expressions -- rather like the atmosphere you'll encounter in the work place. This variety reflects how different people see topics and express them in their writing. You'll experience different levels of effectiveness and not all will be equally good. I've kept in several resumes, for example, which do not meet our guidelines or models of good work, because they are the resumes the writers chose to use. Part of your learning will be to determine for yourselves what is good writing and form. We've tried not to be formulaic or to say that one kind of writing fits all situations and we expect you to make judgements and to consider how to make your own work optimal for the audience you need to address. Ineffect, you won't be able to argue that, just because an expression or form is used somewhere in the course materials, that it constitutes a model of excellence on which you can draw for a high grade. You'll have to look and read and think about what you say and how you display it.

I will have office hours on Tuesday afternoons in PAS 1054 and you can book an appointment through Elaine Sim at x 2345, or take pot-luck by dropping by between 1:30 -- 3:30. I will announce any dates I will not be there, with alternative times (These start Sept 19th). Peter and Daniel will announce their times and locations -- probably my English office, HH 265 -- shortly.

We also plan to spread our MOO contact hours around so some of us will be there for questions and discussion at times we'll announce in news.

Across the term we will be watching for projects, ideas, topics you find interesting and want to explore. As you complete the first two or three assignments, please make suggestions for specific subjects for your report, the final assignment. If you find these tools effective, consider areas of development you might wish to pursue in subsequent
terms. We support these initiatives (and even include some in course modules) so consider discussing them with us at a later stage for further credit or for job possibilities within Co-op. We'll mention possibilities to you as we see them. Remember too that potential employers will be able to look at the course and your involvement as they want to see what skills you've gained. You'll be able to illustrate your contributions within the context of the course materials and we'll be supportive. The SGML tools and technology will be particularly useful.

I'd like to propose one or two meetings with the Distance Ed and Continuing Ed groups -- students studying off campus, around the province. I'm open to suggestions about the form(s) such meetings would take. For instance, I'm happy to consider a Saturday morning session in Waterloo for people local enough to arrive here by 10 for a few hours of contact. Let's discuss this if seem of you see it as useful and we'll ask Maureen Jones to help us organize it. I'm also happy to meet you at the Correspondence Homecoming in a few weeks. Be sure to let me know and we'll set aside a time to talk. I'm delighted we can all work together in this way and I want folks off-campus to feel welcome and well served.

There have been a lot of points in this first message, a copy of which we'll keep at the start of the course for easy reference. We're now in touch and we wish you a lot of pleasure and good fortune in the term ahead.

The World Wide Web offers a effective and innovative method of learning. We have included many different methods of WWW use, including text, hypertext links, graphics, imagemaps and the interactivity of newsgroups and the MOO. Have fun with this experience and we'll be keen to see if you find it useful.