Welcome to English 210G

I’m your instructor, Professor Paul Beam, of the Department of English. You can reach me from this point through the course at: 210g@online-learning.com

I just want to say a warm welcome here. I hope you enjoy this course very much. It’s been popular in all its manifestations and I’ve been delighted, during its development and now in its maturity, with what students have found of ‘learning’ and what they learn. That, for me, is where we begin and where we end – in what you learn. I want you to work because you’re learning, to enjoy each others’ ideas and insights, to take advantage of the help and support we supply and to look on writing as a way to express yourself well, and not as an arcane and frustrating process with a lot of red marks from us. I think you can do that and we will work to make this a pleasant, educational experience.

I’ll ask only these things of you:

■ Please be polite to all of us and to each other
■ Please submit only your own work and use your account exclusively
■ Please participate in the group and class activities on time and with good efforts
■ Please bring your enthusiasm and ideas to the course and our work together.

That’s about it. This is an English course, so there’s lots of emphasis on words and writing, but there’s a lot of good technology, especially around XML, as well and the course teaches you both.

Good ‘writing’ doesn’t exist in a vacuum; it has to be presented in some ‘form’ and that’s what the technical emphasis on markup provides. The course is about both ‘writing well’ and the ‘technology of writing’, hence its name, Technical Writing. So we do both at once and you need to learn about and practice the two together.

When I started this model in the mid 1990s, I wanted to provide these things:

■ your experience of a fully ‘online’ course, in which we all worked together online, all the time. Well, we’ll do exactly that. We meet and work only online and all of us enjoy the benefits, and experience the limitations, of that philosophy.
■ a basis for understanding ‘form’, the markup that makes sophisticated, interactive documents. We do this using and learning about XML
■ online contacts, with the benefits of group work and of all members of the class talking with each other and helping each other in all phases of study.
■ An open environment in which we see, and learn from, each others’ writing, make suggestions, exchange ideas and work together part of the term in groups
■ A window on current academic and business practices, in which class members interact and undertake development in an atmosphere as close to a work environment as possible, with links to business writing groups, professional associations and standards groups, with visits from and access to writing professionals

You now judge how much of that we achieve among ourselves and with others in the next four months. I will try to support your efforts in all these categories.

Instructor Contact: I’m now in contact with you at this email address from this point forward because this is an online course. Our lessons are on the course CD you’ve purchased, our communications are by email, by the discussion groups, by chat sessions, class-scheduled ones and ones you conduct among yourselves, and by the exchanges among us as you submit your assignments, we mark and return them
and then provide tutorial assistance as necessary.

I will bring to the conduct of English 210G the resources and time I would to any section I teach. I will respond to your email on an average of 4 hours per week. Because it is much easier for you to send me email than to arrange an office visit, please understand that I must respond at a ratio of 40+ to 1 so I’ll respond as my time permits and in as much depth as I am able. Where your question is one other students ask, I’ll point you to the FAQs and the Discussion Groups where I’ll expect you to participate and to find information for yourself. We have created large amounts of information in the FAQ sections of the course. The Assignments sections contain detailed and sophisticated outlines, with explanations, of each assignment by steps. The course Discussion Groups will be as good as you make them; they’re yours to develop and to use. You’ll find answers there, but more important, you’ll find contacts. Someone who has posted information there may become a valuable source of help on a particular topic of interest or need. Please use each other in this way and we’ll be monitoring and helping with these topics to keep them current.

The Instructor Group I am the course instructor, responsible for all aspects of the course and for supervision of class members. Helping me are two teaching associates and the support staff of Online Learning. Among us we will resolve issues affecting all class members and we’ll support you at all levels of course development and assignment preparation. We expect you to learn independence but we have among us a great deal of experience in the fields of XML development and of online learning and we’ll bring this to bear in helping you at all stages of your work. At no time will any member of our group become involved with personal issues between the instructor and the student. Your work will be marked consistently, fairly and accurately and you will be able to raise any concerns about grading and instructor contact directly with me for investigation and resolution. We expect in turn a similar professionalism in your preparation of your work, your meeting of schedules and deadlines and your conduct with other class members.

Student Conduct: We all work under the regulations of the University of Waterloo, the Faculty of Arts and the Department of English (and that list is pretty daunting!) What this means is that we observe all the rules of personal conduct, the rights of others and the general requirements of this course as laid out in the Assignments Book. I will attempt always to resolve any personnel problems quickly, with a record of the case and the actions taken.

Your avoidance of plagiarism and your obligations in all group work are presumed [link to ‘plagiarism’] and I reserve the right to consult with group members to determine each person’s contributions and co-operation in any disputed cases. Please refrain from all ‘flames’, ideologically-based arguments and interference with other members’ work.

Online Learning, the Company’s role in the course: By my position in the company and from the tradition through which this course grew, by my research and development at the University of Waterloo, I am able to secure our access to the structure of this online course. Your only costs for the entire software and service consist of the price for the 210G CD. This includes all course materials, editing and conversion software and the processing links to download and display your assignments. All of 210G works inside the OLL structure, on the OLL server and this explains the need for you registering your name and email address. These serve as identifiers of your membership in the course. All facilities are maintained by Online-Learning and security and antivirus processes are in place. Any infringements or security breaches caused from your access will be against this company and will be responded to by the OLL Systems Operator. Loss of your account on disciplinary grounds means you will not be able to complete the course. In any such instance you will be informed of the concern and given an opportunity to respond personally. Your privacy on your account, within the course is assured; we do not monitor private communications.
Allow no one access to your account under any circumstances. Protect your password. Use your course account for course-related matters exclusively.

**English 210G as an ‘open’ course:** An important feature of this course is that students are expected to read and learn from other students’ writing and documents. All participants are permitted, and in fact, are expected, to read other students’ submissions in three of the assignments in the forms they are submitted prior to marking. All marked assignments are private to the individual student and can be seen by others only as the owner chooses to distribute the material.

The learning that results from both group work and from reading others’ submissions is very valuable. Students see other’s good ideas and models; they see that their own writing is in a range of their peers and they find they can discuss ideas with their fellows in terms of each one’s shared expression.

These assignments are exclusively for the course members’ own, internal use and edification. They may not be copied or distributed in any way. Such conduct will be deemed to constitute theft and will be dealt with summarily.

**Communications and meetings:** We meet entirely online for the duration of the course. We do not meet in person on campus because all students enjoy a ‘level playing field’ in terms of access to instruction, to other class members and to all class resources; numbers of you will be taking the course remotely and will not be able to meet at my office or in a classroom. The web, your accounts and your PCs are our classroom. They work well, as you’ll find when you begin to use them.

**Requirements and duties:** You will have to complete four assignment groups, as laid out by the Assignments Book on the course BookShell. These are detailed and if you follow the directions, they will take you in the steps you must complete to fulfill them. You must observe the schedule for delivery of your work as laid out in the Calendar. You must complete these and have them on the course server on time.

The Assignments are sequential in two ways:

- they increase in complexity in the demands we make on your research, organization and expression of written documents. This is a course in Technical Writing and it is offered and assessed under the standards and expectations of the English Department. We assess all writing at the levels we expect of 2\textsuperscript{nd}-year English students. We mark your assignments in detail and then the class looks at and discusses the results in tutorials.

- The second aspect of the course consists of your coming to understand and use ‘mark up’. This is the set of codes by which ‘content’ – the ‘text’, the narrative, the integrated multimedia expression of the assignment – is created and displayed. Markup is the ‘technical’ part of the course and we use a sophisticated and current methodology called XML. You will learn a good deal about its importance and its structure as we proceed. What I need you to see at the outset is that your knowledge of, and ability to use, this technology is what distinguishes this course from many of its counterparts in the program. The course materials contain much good material to explain XML and its associated tools and we support
I believe you will find this a rich and useful experience and all my research has indicated that it is a social and intellectual opportunity as well. I teach and do research in this medium because I have found, over eight years of development and instruction, that the vast majority of students have welcomed the methodology, have worked well in it, in their own perceptions and in their performance as rated by their assignments and activities. In effect, this form of learning works. We expect that it will require between eight and ten hours of your time per week and we expect that you will be able to demonstrate that commitment, to your classmates and group members and to us in the quality of your submissions and communications.

A final point: In every section I have instructed, through the University and for organizations and individuals, some class members have found a real affinity for this kind of instruction. They have continued to work with me, in research, in development and in course operations, as tutors, researchers and as instructors, as students taking additional courses for credit and as employees. I welcome your interest and questions and, where I find particularly notable performance, I may ask you about your interest in further studies or involvement. When I do that I am extending a compliment and an invitation in a situation I regard as the best synthesis of learning and teaching. I hope many of you experience that kind of intellectual enjoyment and that we work together in a new and very productive pedagogy.

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