Academic Writing - Course Syllabus Winter 2016

Description

The Academic Writing class is an intensive analysis of the principles of excellent academic writing for Scientists preparing a range of texts including research papers, conference proposals, conference posters, book chapters, technical reports, dissertations.

Class discussion focuses on the central role of rhetorical positioning in the development of a clear, interesting, and rigorous science research paper. We talk about the significance of narrowing the problem space, the construction of logical arguments, the reporting and interpretation of data, as well as other important concepts including reader-oriented writing, genre, precision, tone, and strategies useful for redrafting and editing. Some of the sub-genres we analyze and practice include introductions, data commentaries, results/discussion, conclusions, and abstracts.

An important course goal is the refinement of students' skills as critical readers so that they are able to offer explicit and useful feedback to colleagues and co-writers.

Students receive detailed feedback on their writing through class activities as well as individual conferencing throughout the course. During all editing and redrafting activities, attention is given to the structure and logic of the author's argument, the use of detail and visuals, the placement of transitions, word choice, and flow.

Enrollment

Graduate students and postdocs
Maximum enrollment - 30

Course Format

Two class meetings each week: 90/120 minutes each
One-on-one meetings with the instructor throughout the course

Class organization

The class combines lecture and discussion with other activities including writing for fluency, peer editing, and group analysis and editing of student writing.

Class activities

Each class session includes writing, text analysis, and redrafting/editing work.
Composing. We discuss and practice the important distinction between the composing of text and the editing process. Students write during each class meeting to see first-hand how writers develop content and fluency through practice with timed, unedited journal-type writing.
Peer editing. Student pairs read and give extensive feedback to each other's text, a vital aspect of writing development.
Group editing. We discuss and edit student texts that we project on a screen in front of the class.

Location
Skirball 2nd Floor CR

Date/Time
Mondays & Thursdays, Jan. 11th - Jan. 28th
10:00-11:30 am

Course Topics
1. Rhetorical positioning (audience, story, purpose, organization, style, flow, presentation)
2. Narrowing the problem space
3. The construction of logical arguments
4. Reader-oriented writing (register, tone, precision, clarity, grammar)
5. Composing v editing
6. Discourse community and genre
7. Sections of a science paper
    - Introductions
    - Methods
    - Data Commentaries
    - Results
    - Discussion/Conclusions
    - Abstracts
    - Acknowledgments
8. Other professional writing (critiques, requests for funding, bio-data statements, blogs)
9. Other important topics
    - Formal style and vocabulary
    - Formal style and grammar
    - Commas, parentheses, dash skewers
    - Argument, voice, rhythm

Materials
A class packet that includes detailed sections on all topics covered in the class.
Supplementary texts and references -
1. Academic Writing for Graduate Students - Essential Tasks and Skills. Second Edition. John M. Swales and Christine B. Feak. 2004. The U. of Michigan Press.
2. Abstracts and the Writing of Abstracts. John M. Swales and Christine B. Feak. 2009. The U. of Michigan Press.
3. The Elements of Style. Fourth Edition. William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White. 2000. Longman.
4. On Writing Well. 30th Anniversary Edition. William Zinsser. 2006. HarperCollins Publishers.
5. Writing for Computer Science. Second Edition. Justin Zobel. 2004. Springer.
6. Scientific Writing - A Reader and Writer's Guide. Jean-Luc Lebrun. 2007. World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd.
7. Science Research Writing for Non-Native speakers of English. Hilary Glasman-Deal. 2010. Imperial College Press.
8. "The art of writing science." Kevin W. Plaxco. 2010. Protein Science. Volume 19, Issue 12, 2261-2266.

About Janet Kayfetz, PhD

I am an Applied Linguist, and I have taught academic writing and presentation skills to both native and nonnative speakers of English for 30 years. I work with graduate students, researchers, postdocs, faculty, and business professionals in a wide range of interesting areas including computer science, engineering, environmental science and policy, bioengineering, medicine, business, and law. Some of the groups I have worked with include the University of California, Santa Barbara -- Departments of Computer Science, Mechanical Engineering, Materials Science, and the Bren School of Environmental Science and Management; Columbia University Computer Science and Engineering; Columbia University and NYU Medical Schools; Albert Einstein College of Medicine; NYU Neuroscience Institute; NYU College of Dentistry; Clinical Outcomes and Analytics Group, Walgreens. I also served as served as director of the ESL Program at UCSB.

In all of my work, my goal is to create a culture of excellence in the communication of ideas, new knowledge, opinions, and even casual interactions. I focus on the principles of rhetorical positioning and the development of a logical and interesting story, clarity of expression, precision in word choice, and the relationship between tone, personal style, and authenticity.