

Public Policy 522: Writing Effectively for Public Policy
Fall 2019

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Classroom:	1220 Weill	2120 Weill

***Please note the location of our four joint sessions:*

- 9/13; 10/18; 11/1: 1220 Weill
- 10/4: 3240 Weill

Dates and Time: Fridays from 12:00 – 1:20pm. We'll meet each Friday through November 15.

Course Goals

In this ten-week course, students will learn to write for a public policy audience. Students will research a policy topic of their own choosing and will write about it in three successive memos. In your fourth assignment, an op-ed, you may choose a new topic or continue with the same topic. Through workshops, class discussion, and instructor feedback, students will finish the course with a strong writing sample and greater confidence in policy writing norms and style.

Course Content

This course will introduce you to four distinct genres of policy writing: the background memo, options analysis, the decision memo, and the op-ed. Before we write and critique any of these genres ourselves, we will discuss samples within the genre so that you have a working understanding of what each genre prioritizes.

Requirements

This course's success will require active student participation. Students are expected to take all requirements seriously and to give us your best writing—and your best criticism.

Requirements for passing the course include

- Completion of four writing assignments: three memos (backgrounder, option analysis, decision memo) and one op-ed.
- Active participation, which includes a) critiquing your peers' written work; b) attendance and punctuality; c) volunteering your ideas.

Failure to meet these requirements will result in an “unsatisfactory” course grade.

Workshop, Peer Critiques, and Instructor Feedback

Large Group Workshops

Each of you will have one of your papers workshopped by your entire section. When it is your turn to be workshopped, your classmates will come to class prepared to discuss your work, having read it and written a critique of it, and they will each give you a printed copy of their critique at the end of the workshop discussion. ***(Please submit these to Canvas before the start of class on the day of the workshop and bring a hard copy to class to give to the workshoppee at the end of the discussion.)***

Small group workshops

You will receive peer feedback for your first three documents. To facilitate this, your instructors will pair you with one or two other students. (The composition of the groups will change with each paper.) On the day we conduct small group workshops, students will read their groupmates' papers ahead of time and come prepared with suggestions.

Critique content

A critique should consist of roughly three typed paragraphs and should include:

- a few sentences explaining what, *specifically*, you think is working well in the piece of writing and why/how it is working well.
- “big picture” questions or concerns: what didn't you understand? what felt poorly supported? what was organizationally ineffective?
- *specific* suggestions for ways the author could address your concerns in revision and thereby strengthen the piece.

Any style or sentence-level issue can be indicated directly in the document by using Track Changes (you would then email the file, with your comments, to the writer), or you can print out the paper and mark suggested edits longhand on your hard copy. It should go without saying that the aim of these workshops and critiques is to encourage rather than discourage. That doesn't mean, though, that you should withhold your honest appraisal. As opposed to generic praise, you should provide thoughtful, constructive criticism that engages with the author's ideas and words. Whenever you make a general assessment (something was “interesting,” “compelling,” “confusing,” etc.), make sure to explain *why*. And when you make a broad observation (e.g., “you make persuasive use of data” or “your op-ed was emotionally powerful”), always point to *specific examples*, from the text, to support your comment. The more specific you are in your critiques, the more useful your criticism will be to the writer.

****Please see our separate handout for more information on writing peer critiques.***

Instructor Feedback

You will receive written feedback on the document that you submit to be workshopped. For the other three documents, you have the option of setting up individual appointments with the instructor to discuss the work further; we recommend doing this soon after you turn in each document. Appointments can be made through the Ford School Writing

Center scheduler: <https://fordschool.mywconline.com/>. If none of our appointment times work for you, please let your instructor know.

Essay Format & Logistics:

All papers—including first drafts—must be typed, proofread, and stapled, double-spaced. Use a reasonable font and a reasonable point size (12 point), and paginate. Kindly avoid sloppy work (e.g., typos, tangled syntax, grammatical lapses).

Papers should be uploaded to Canvas before the beginning of class.

If you foresee a conflict with a due date, speak with your instructor at least one week in advance.

Our Classroom Values & the Ford School's Academic Expectations

Below we have included information from the Ford School administration that you've probably seen on the syllabi of other Ford classes. We do, though, want to briefly elaborate. Simply put, as your teachers, it's our responsibility to do our best to ensure that each one of you feels respected and heard. If conflicts arise, or if you feel uncomfortable with something we say—or that a classmate says—please let us know right away. Our goal is to help you to write the strongest papers you can—but it's also to help create a classroom space that prioritizes learning and a meaningful exchange of ideas.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The Ford School academic community, like all communities, functions best when its members treat one another with honesty, fairness, respect, and trust. We hold all members of our community to high standards of scholarship and integrity. To accomplish its mission of providing an optimal educational environment and developing leaders of society, the Ford School promotes the assumption of personal responsibility and integrity and prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty, plagiarism and misconduct. Academic dishonesty may be understood as any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage for oneself or an unfair academic advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the academic community. Plagiarism involves representing the words, ideas, or work of others as one's own in writing or presentations, and failing to give full and proper credit to the original source. Conduct, without regard to motive, that violates the academic integrity and ethical standards will result in serious consequences and disciplinary action.

Additional information regarding academic dishonesty, plagiarism and misconduct and their consequences is available at: <http://www.rackham.umich.edu/current-students/policies/academic-policies...>

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you believe you need an accommodation for a disability, please let your instructor know at your earliest convenience. Some aspects of courses may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make your instructor aware of your needs, they can work with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office to help determine

appropriate academic accommodations. Any information you provide will be treated as private and confidential.

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. We acknowledge that a variety of issues, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, and depression, directly impacts students' academic performance. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) and/or University Health Service (UHS). For a listing of other mental health resources available on and off campus, visit: <http://umich.edu/~mhealth/>.

INCLUSIVITY STATEMENT

Members of the Ford School community represent a rich variety of backgrounds and perspectives. We are committed to providing an atmosphere for learning that respects diversity. While working together to build this community we ask all members to:

- share their unique experiences, values and beliefs
- be open to the views of others
- honor the uniqueness of their colleagues
- appreciate the opportunity that we have to learn from each other in this community
- value one another's opinions and communicate in a respectful manner
- keep confidential discussions that the community has of a personal (or professional) nature
- use this opportunity together to discuss ways in which we can create an inclusive environment in Ford classes and across the UM community

SCHEDULE

MEMO PART I – BACKGROUNDERS

Class #1 – September 13 (Joint Class #1: Meet in 1220 Weill)

- Policy writing norms (brief review from orientation session)
- Backgrounder discussion
- Generating topic ideas
- Solicit Volunteer #1 to submit Backgrounder for Class #2 workshop
- Determine volunteers for remaining workshops

Homework to be completed before 9/20:

- *Review line editing principles (Canvas: “2019 sentence clarity orientation”)*
- *Drawing on these line editing principles, choose one paragraph that you've written at Ford (or recently in a professional capacity) and aggressively line edit—bring to class*
- *Critique Volunteer #1's Backgrounder Memo and upload your critique (except your line edits) to Canvas*

Class 2 – September 20

- Workshop #1, Backgrounder _____

- Style Exercises
- Peer Group Workshop discussion: norms and expectations

Homework to be completed before 9/27:

- Critique Volunteer #2's Backgrounder Memo; upload critique to Canvas
- Finish Backgrounder Memo; upload to Canvas
- Read backrounders from your peer workshop group; come prepared to discuss

Class 3 – September 27

- Workshop #2, Backgrounder _____
- Small Group Peer Workshops

DUE: Backrounders

Homework to be completed before 10/4:

- Read sample Options Analyses (available on Canvas)

MEMO PART II – OPTIONS ANALYSIS

Class 4 – October 4 (Joint Class #2: New Classroom Location: 3240 Weill)

- Options Analyses Discussion

Homework to be completed before 10/11:

- Read and critique Options Analyses from Volunteers #3 and #4
- Finish Options Analysis
- Read options analyses from your peer workshop group; come prepared to discuss

Class 5 – October 11

- Workshop #3, Options Analyses _____
- Workshop #4, Options Analyses _____
- Small Group Peer Workshops

DUE: Options Analysis

Homework to be completed before 10/18:

- Read sample Op-Eds (available on Canvas)

THE OP-ED

Class 6 – October 18 (Joint Class #3: Meet in 1220 Weill)

- Op-ed Discussion
- Op-ed topic exercise

Homework to be completed before 10/25:

- Read and critique Op-Eds from Volunteers #5 and #6

- *Finish Op-ed*
- *Read op-eds from your peer workshop group; come prepared to discuss*

Class 7 – October 25

- Workshop #5, Op-ed _____
- Workshop #6, Op-ed _____
- Op-ed Small Group Workshops

DUE: The Op-ed

Homework to be completed before 11/1:

- *Read sample Decision Memos*
- *Read and critique Op-ed from Volunteer #7*

MEMO PART III: FINAL DECISION MEMO

Class 8 –November 1 (Joint class #4)

- Final Decision Memo Discussion
- Workshop #7, Op-ed _____

Homework to be completed before 11/8:

- *Read and critique Decision Memos from Volunteers #8 and #9*

Class 9 – November 8

- Workshop #8, Complete Decision Memo _____
- Workshop #9, Complete Decision Memo _____

Homework to be completed before 11/15:

- *Read and critique Decision Memos from Volunteers #10 and #11*
- *Finish Decision Memo*

Class 10 – November 15

- Workshop #10, Complete Decision Memo _____
- Workshop #11, Complete Decision Memo _____

DUE: Complete Decision Memo