The LBJ School of Public Affairs
Advanced Topics in Public Policy

Writing for Policy

OVERVIEW

“The ability to think for oneself depends upon one’s mastery of the language.”

Joan Didion, from Slouching Towards Bethlehem

One of the many roles of graduate school is to immerse students in the specialized language of the chosen field and the particular ways in which that language is used in professional and academic settings.

In Writing for Policy, you will practice and refine the professional writing skills expected in typical professional policy environments. You’ll complete weekly writing assignments and in-class case studies geared at honing your approach to drafting and revising strong written policy work.

You’ll work to sharpen the writing skills you already have, employ a new set of discipline-specific tools, and analyze the uses and abuses of argument strategy in the field of public policy.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Grades will be based on class preparation/participation (15%), in-class practice assignments (10%) and formal writing assignments (75%). There is no final.

- **Class preparation/participation** includes attendance, reading preparation, and the quality of your participation in discussions and peer review exercises. Since we will conduct weekly in-class activities, your attendance is essential to this grade. If you must miss class for any reason, please try to let me know in advance.

- **In-class practice assignments** will generally be short exercises at the beginning of class to practice using and integrating sources.

- **Writing assignments** include 9 short writing assignments, 4 rewrites, and 2 in-class writing assignments, each with equal weight (5% of your final grade).

Each assignment will be submitted as a Word document to the class Canvas site, though some in-class work may require that you also bring a copy to class. Please pay close attention to the assignment prompt and to Canvas.

NEED ASSISTANCE?

Students with questions or concerns should come see me or Esther during our office hours, send questions via email, and make use of the LBJ Writing Center.

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities at 512-471-6259 (voice) or 512-410-6644 (video phone) or e-mail ssd@austin.utexas.edu or http://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/
Course Schedule

1  Aug 27

**READ**
*Skim* Strunk & White: *The Elements of Style*, 4th Edition. Come prepared with questions/comments about rules you find helpful, confusing, or suspect.

Williams & Bizup: “Using Sources” from *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. pp. 230-238.

Take pre-course survey by **August 27th at 10 a.m.**

**IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES**
- Review syllabus/introduction to class
- Conduct policy writing case study
- Draft an argument

**DUE NEXT TIME**
**ASSIGNMENT 1**
Revised two-page argument

2  Sept 3

**READ**
George Orwell, *“Politics and the English Language.”*

Review [www.bookofbadarguments.com](http://www.bookofbadarguments.com) and find one or more examples of “bad arguments” to bring to class. (See Canvas for ideas)

Peter Elbow: “Direct Writing,” “Quick Revising,” and “The Dangerous Method” from *Writing with Power*. (on Canvas)

Anne Lamott: “Shitty First Drafts” from *Bird by Bird*. (on Canvas)

**IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES**
- Discuss evidence and rhetoric in policy
- Discuss process writing
- Analyze and respond to arguments
- Make good use of sources

**DUE NEXT TIME**
**ASSIGNMENT 2**
750-1000 word summary/analysis

3  Sept 10

**READ**
Williams & Bizup: *skim* Part One “Correctness” and *read* Part Two “Clarity” from *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. pp. 28-93.

Catherine Smith: Chapter Four “Evaluation: Analyze and Advise” from *Writing Public Policy*. (on Canvas)

Graff & Birkenstein: selected excerpts from *They Say, I Say*. (on Canvas)

Choose one sample selection on Canvas.

**Recommended:**
Attend Robert Reich or Julian Castro events and note use of argument, language, and sources.

**IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES**
- Discuss argument analysis
- Review briefs, memos, and white papers
- Practice writing and revising for clarity

**DUE NEXT TIME**
**ASSIGNMENT 3**
750-1000 word policy brief
READ
Williams & Bizup: Part Three “Clarity of Form” from Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace. pp. 98-124.
William Zinsser: “Simplicity,” “Clutter,” and “Business Writing” from On Writing Well. (on Canvas)
Peter Elbow: “Two Kinds of Feedback” from Writing with Power. (on Canvas)
Choose two sample selections on Canvas.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES
- Discuss process for review and revision
- Exercises in concision
- Peer review assignment 3
- Make revision plan

DUE NEXT TIME
REVISION 1
Revised policy brief

READ
Catherine Smith: Chapter 8 “Briefing Memo or Opinion Statement: Inform Policy Makers” from
Writing Public Policy. (on Canvas)
Choose two sample selections on Canvas.
Optional: Garfinkle: “Policy Memoranda” from Political Writing, A Guide to the Essentials. (on Canvas)

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES
- Discuss and practice focus and concision
- Practice parsing and planning writing assignments
- Practice choosing approach and evidence
- Compare decision memo/briefing memo

DUE NEXT TIME
ASSIGNMENT 4
750-1000 word memo (based on parameters chosen in class)

READ
Williams & Bizup: Part Four “Grace” and Part Five “Ethics” from Style: Lessons in Clarity and
Grace. pp. 126-167; 188-205. (Skip “Elegance” for now.)
Choose two sample selections on Canvas.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES
- Discuss revising for global, paragraph-level, sentence-level, and style issues
- Peer review memo
- Make revision plan

DUE NEXT TIME
REVISION 2
Revise your policy memo

IN-CLASS MEMO NEXT CLASS

READ
Peter Elbow: “Audience as a Focusing Force” from Writing with Power. (on Canvas)
Steven Pinker: “The Curse of Knowledge” from The Sense of Style. (on Canvas)
Peter W. Galbraith: “How to Write a Cable,” Foreign Policy, 22 February 2011.
Choose two cables from either the WikiLeaks CableGate site or this archive website and bring to class for discussion.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES
- Discuss audience in various policy writing scenarios
- Discuss letters, emails, and cables
- In-Class Memo Assignment

DUE NEXT TIME
ASSIGNMENT 5
A cable and an email (based on parameters chosen in class)
READ
Adam Garfinkle: selected excerpts from *Political Writing, A Guide to the Essentials*. (on Canvas)
Choose two sample selections on Canvas.
Choose one speech from [http://www.americanrhetoric.com/top100speechesall.html](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/top100speechesall.html), listen and read, and bring to class to discuss.
View Stephen Colbert’s testimony to subcommittee on immigration: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1T75jBYeCs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1T75jBYeCs)

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES
- Oral argument
- Discuss speeches and talking points
- Analyze a speech/testimony
- Draft speech talking points

DUE NEXT TIME
ASSIGNMENT 6
Speech talking points

READ
George Lakoff: selected excerpts from *Thinking Points*. (on Canvas)
Catherine Smith: Chapter 9 “Testimony: Witness in a Public Hearing.” from *Writing Public Policy*. (on Canvas)
Choose two sample selections on Canvas.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES
- Oral argument practice and peer review

DUE NEXT TIME
ASSIGNMENT 7
Be prepared to deliver short speech and turn in revised talking points.

READ
John Daly: selected excerpts from *Advocacy: Championing Ideas and Influencing Others* (on Canvas)
Review a few current federal regulations with “comments due soon” and open the docket folder to see related information and comments at [http://www.regulations.gov/#!home](http://www.regulations.gov/#!home). Come prepared to discuss.
Choose two sample selections on Canvas.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES
- Discuss advocacy writing
- In-class speeches

DUE NEXT TIME
REVISION 3
Revise speech into written testimony
IN-CLASS EMAIL NEXT CLASS

READ
“Hillary Clinton Aide Tells Reporter to ‘Fuck Off’ and ‘Have a Good Life,’” BuzzFeed Politics, September 24 2012.
Choose two sample selections on Canvas.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES
- Discuss press kits
- Press response case study
- In-class pressure email

DUE NEXT TIME
ASSIGNMENT 8
Press release
12
Nov 12

READ
George Lakoff. “The Art of Arguments.” From Thinking Points. (on Canvas)
Choose two sample selections on Canvas.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES
- Discuss op-eds, blogs, and mass media
- Discuss ethics and rhetoric in public communications
- Practice employing rhetorical strategies

DUE NEXT TIME
ASSIGNMENT 9
750-1000 word blog or op-ed
(based on parameters chosen in class)

13
Nov 19

READ
John Daly: selected excerpts from Advocacy: Championing Ideas and Influencing Others. (on Canvas)
Browse U.S. Department of state press releases, briefings, and op-eds here:
Choose two sample selections on Canvas.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES
- Advocacy case study
- Peer review
- Revision plan

DUE NEXT TIME
REVISION 4
Revised blog/op-ed

14
Nov 26

THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY – NO CLASS

15
Dec 3

READ
Choose two sample selections on Canvas.
Watch Jon Stewart: “Three Different Types of Bullshit.” From The Daily Show.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES
- Class Wrap Up
- Parting thoughts and next steps
- Individual recommendations
- Course evaluations (online)

DUE NEXT TIME
ASSIGNMENT 9
750-1000 word blog or op-ed
(based on parameters chosen in class)