

Communication Clinic I 2018/19

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Communication Clinic I 2018/19

Aims of the Clinics

- enable you to identify your own strengths and weaknesses in communicating science.
- offer guidance for improving in both writing and speaking skills within a science communication context.
- develop self-learning strategies is a major focus, e.g. through one-on-one coaching sessions and peer-group feedback.

That's why the clinics can be repeated as many times as necessary (testation)

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Assessment criteria:

For Clinic One we will use a threefold set of criteria for assignments: language, style and content. The emphasis at this stage will be on accuracy regarding use of language.

Language:

CEFR B2 is the level which students need to have achieved before being allowed to proceed with their studies. This will be demonstrated by passing Clinic I.

The formal CEFR criteria for B2 (upper intermediate) are as follows:

- Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their field of specialization
- Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain from either party
- Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options

Style:

Style and argumentation of assignments need to be reasonably conclusive and structured.

Content:

Student assignments need to be at least without major mistakes in the scientific content.

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Language

Accuracy: spelling, syntax, consistency of tenses/pronouns/articles, punctuation, range of vocabulary

Clarity: clear use of language, clear message, no ambiguity

Style

Structure: appropriate for format, i.e. news article/ text analysis/ feature article/ peer assessment

Unity: consistent and appropriate register for target audience, voice, mood

Variety: captivating, grabs and keeps the reader's attention to the end

Flow: logical structure, linkage, cohesion, rhythm

Content

Relevance: filtering process - which facts are necessary for your message?

Balance: fact and opinion, personal and professional

Concision: KISS (keep it simple stupid) principle

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- For each major written assignment there is a rough draft phase, followed by teacher and peer feedback sessions.
- I'll try to arrange a one-on-one session with each of you
- rewrites should reflect criticism received and show considerable improvement.
- Since the emphasis in Clinic One is on accuracy all written work will be graded as follows:
 - Accuracy in use of language: 60 %
 - Style: 20% (emphasis on flow and variety)
 - Content: 20% (emphasis on concision and balance between fact and opinion)

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The clinic isn't just about writing:

Verbal: pronunciation and articulation of

- individual sounds (phonemes) - consonant (voiced/unvoiced), vowels (short/long) and diphthongs
- connected speech - word stress, sentence stress, strong and weak forms, intonation

Non-verbal: gesture, mimic, posture, eye contact, awareness of cultural differences

Presentation: Verbal and non-verbal communication plus things like pausing for effect, and pitch

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Assignments – deadlines and weighting:

Text Analysis:

- News article (due next week; 10%)
- Feature article (10%)

Writing News Article:

Rough Draft

Peer Review

Rewrite > Final draft (30%)

Writing Science Feature:

Rough Draft

Peer Review

Rewrite > Final draft (30%)

Speaking:

Presentation on an assigned chapter from the readings (10%)

Presentation on a complex process (10%)

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Assignments – deadlines and weighting:

- Deadlines may change due to field trips, illness or remedial work.
- Deadlines must be met, otherwise an attest will be required
- All written work will be checked for plagiarism
- Spoken work will be assessed in class

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Readings

Core text:

- Zinsser, William (2006): On Writing Well (30th Anniversary Edition). Harper Perennial, esp. Ch 2 – 12; 15; 20

Further reading:

- Science Writers' Handbook, Ch 7: Sculpting the Story (basic structures overview)
- Scanlan, Christopher (2000): Reporting and Writing – Basics for the 21st Century: [WILL BE PROVIDED AS HANDOUTS]
 - Ch 3 (Focusing, mapping, writing and rewriting your story)
 - Ch 4 (Finding and writing a lead)
 - Ch 5 (Story forms)
- Brady, John: Craft of Interviewing
 - Ch 12 (on quotes and paraphrasing) [WILL BE PROVIDED AS A HANDOUT]
- Blum, Deborah et al. eds. (2006): "Writing Well About Science: Techniques from Teachers of Science Writing". A field guide for science writers. OUP. pp. 26-33
- Johnson, George (2006): "Explanatory Writing". In: Deborah Blum et al. (eds.) A field guide for science writers. New York: OUP. pp. 132-137
- Shreeve, Jamie (2006): "Narrative Writing". In: Deborah Blum et al. (eds.) A field guide for science writers. New York: OUP. pp. 138-144
- The Open Notebook on ledes, transitions, nut grafs, endings and editing your own work [WILL BE PROVIDED AS A HANDOUTS]

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Writing almost never comes out right the first time around.

Biggest part of writing =
rewriting (editing yourself)

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Some basic writing advice, part 1 (all with exceptions, of course):

- Begin sentences with **subjects** and **verbs**.
- Use **active** verbs that are **precise, sturdy, useful, strong, reliable, not showy**.
- **KISS (Keep It Simple, Stupid)**:
 - Use **short, Anglo-Saxon** words (rain; use), not fancy Latin words (precipitation; utilize).
 - Prefer the **simple** over the technical: **shorter** words and paragraphs at the points of greatest complexity.
- Dig for the **concrete** and **specific** (the name of the dog, the make of the car).
- Start with the **details**, end with the abstraction, not the other way around:
Begin at the bottom of the ladder of abstraction, at the level of bloody knives and rosary beads, of wedding rings and baseball cards. Then climb to the top to summarize and analyze, discovering meaning in the world's random details.
- Avoid **adverbs** (“**completely** destroyed”), **unnecessary adjectives** (“**sleepy** lagoons”), little qualifiers (“**a bit,**” “**sort of**”).

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Some basic writing advice, part 2 (all with exceptions, of course):

- Place strong words at the beginning of sentences and paragraphs, and at the end. Any word next to the period plays **jazz**.
- When you're done writing, go back over the piece and circle all the is's, was's, and were's (**forms of the verb “to be”**). See if you can't come up with active verbs to replace them.
- **Vary** sentence and paragraph length.
- **Read** your work aloud and **printed** out.
- Whenever possible, when you finish a story, **sleep on it** and look at it again the next day.
- Strive for **unity** of **tense** (past/present), **pronoun** (1st/3rd person), and **mood/ tone** (formal versus casual).
- **Have fun!**

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One example for one of these element of good writing:
VARIETY!

“This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It’s like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety.

Now listen. I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length. And sometimes, when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals—sounds that say listen to this, it is important.”

- Taken from Gary Provost, “100 Ways To Improve Your Writing”

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Assessment: Freewriting exercise

5 min: Write anything that comes to your mind

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5 min: Write anything that comes to your mind

Now read it out loud! (No worries! Again, that's how you find mistake or problems.)

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So what are some examples of good and bad writing?

Discuss: what are the differences? What do you like most? Why?
What do you like least? Why?

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Hi Liza,

I see you've covered environmental and health issues and wanted to reach out with some news on a new sustainable product! On **April 18th**, [TUSHY](#), the chic bidet attachment brand that transforms any standard toilet into a booty wonderland, is creating a more mindful, sustainable alternative with the launch of a new environmentally friendly addition to your bathroom.

I thought you might be interested in the details prior to launch. Let me know if the embargo date of April 18th works for you. I'd love to share additional details on Tushy's latest environmental pooperhero for the loo or send along a press kit if you'd like!

Thanks,
Emily

About TUSHY

We believe a clean booty is a happy booty. The easy-to-install modern bidet attachment is a sleek way to modernize your bathroom. It helps people feel cleaner, keep booties healthier, and helps improve our environment. TUSHY wants to forever change the way people clean their rears.

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Compressor repaired in just 8 weeks following catastrophic failure

Industrial compressors are used for a range of applications and usually perform a central role in a manufacturing process, requiring them to deliver a reliable service. All operators carry out preventative maintenance routines to protect against unexpected failures, but if the worst does happen the repair needs to be completed quickly and efficiently. For one blue chip company, Sulzer was able to get operations back up and running swiftly using the experienced, local service center in Leeds.

In this particular case, the operator of the compressor required more air pressure and unfortunately believed this could be achieved by closing the surge valve. The consequence of this action was to cause the rotor to become unbalanced and hit the top diaphragm, resulting in damage to the impellers and all of the labyrinth seals.

The compressor was originally manufactured by Sulzer and the operator made two calls with a view to having the equipment repaired - one to the local service center and the other to an alternative original equipment manufacturer (OEM). Sulzer agreed to be on site immediately to inspect the damage and offer a proposal for the repair. With time being a crucial element in this project, Sulzer was contracted to complete the repair.

The initial inspection took place at the operator's site and it was immediately apparent that of the three stages, number two had suffered catastrophic damage, along with the labyrinth seals. [...]

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Mrs. Kelly's Monster

by Jon Franklin

In the cold hours of a winter morning Dr. Thomas Barbee Ducker, chief brain surgeon at the University of Maryland Hospital, rises before dawn. His wife serves him waffles but no coffee. Coffee makes his hands shake.

In downtown Baltimore, on the 12th floor of University Hospital, Edna Kelly's husband tells her goodbye. For 57 years Mrs. Kelly shared her skull with the monster: No more. Today she is frightened but determined.

It is 6:30 a.m.

"I'm not afraid to die," she said as this day approached. "I've lost part of my eyesight. I've gone through all the hemorrhages. A couple of years ago I lost my sense of smell, my taste. I started having seizures. I smell a strange odor and then I start strangling. It started affecting my legs, and I'm partially paralyzed.

"Three years ago a doctor told me all I had to look forward to was blindness, paralysis and a remote chance of death. Now I have aneurysms; this monster is causing that. I'm scared to death . . . but there isn't a day that goes by that I'm not in pain, and I'm tired of it. I can't bear the pain. I wouldn't want to live like this much longer."

As Dr. Ducker leaves for work, Mrs. Ducker hands him a paper bag containing a peanut butter sandwich, a banana and two fig newtons.

Downtown, in Mrs. Kelly's brain, a sedative takes effect.

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Challenge: Government or company writing often (in the case of government even sometimes intentionally to hide the real meaning) verbose and full of clutter.

- Air Force missile crash: “impacted with the ground prematurely.” [Zinsser p15]
- U.S. Government memo 1942 (during WWII):
Such preparations shall be made as will completely obscure all Federal buildings and non-Federal buildings occupied by the Federal government during an air raid for any period of time from visibility by reason of internal or external illumination.

Pres. Roosevelt:

“Tell them that in buildings where they have to keep the work going to put something across the windows.”

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Now what types of science writing are the most important ones?

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<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x1zanfe>

From 9:00

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Now what types of science writing are the most important ones?

1) News story!

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Now what types of science writing are the most important ones?

- 1) News story:
 - Just to inform
 - Gives most important information up top, then relevance decreases (inverted pyramid style)
 - Comes from the time when news editors didn't know how much space they had in print, so they could cut from the bottom
 - So what is the most important information?

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5Ws (who?, what?, where?, when?, why?)

H (how)

SW (so what: tells reader why it's important and why they should care)

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Let's analyze a news story.

- 1) 1st graf of AP news story (HANDOUT; page 117 Scanlan):
- 2) Read and write down what's the 5Ws and H here [5 min]

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Gunmen Make Getaway on City Bus

Filed at 6:11 a.m. EDT

The Associated Press
May 10, 1997

NEW YORK—Heavily armed gunmen ambushed a payroll delivery and got away with \$50,000 after spraying a quiet street with bullets, critically wounding a moonlighting off-duty detective and a retired police officer.

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WHO

- Heavily armed gunmen
- Moonlighting off-duty detective
- Retired police officer

WHAT

- Ambushed payroll delivery
- Critically wounding

WHERE

- Quiet New York City street

WHEN

- Not in lead

WHY

- \$50,000

HOW

- Spraying with bullets

Analysis: Aimed at a nationwide audience, this wire service story focuses on the event and players (cops, robbers). Characterizes place ("quiet") but doesn't give precise location.

Length: 30 words

Grade: A. Vivid, clear, economical

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Let's analyze a news story.

- 1) 1st graf of AP news story (handout; page 117 Scanlan):
- 2) Read and write down what's the 5Ws and H here [5 min]

Now let's do the same with a recent science news story from the *Guardian*.

- 1) Again, read and write down what's the 5Ws and H here [5 min]

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Now let's do another exercise:

Assume you are all very famous so the answer to the “so what?” question is clear: The fact that you all just moved to Kleve is front-page news!

Now, imagine you are the reporter covering that: Ask each other the 5Ws and the H for a news story about the interviewee coming to Kleve. Then write a short news story reporting that.

Before you do that, there's one more thing: What's the stuff called between “quotation marks?”

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Quotes! Only use them for color, i.e. emotional statements, not for stating facts. Otherwise: Paraphrase!

Good: “That's the worst thing I have ever seen,” she said.

Bad: “I was born in Brazil and am 20 years old,” she said.

Instead paraphrase like *she said she was born 20 years ago in Brazil.*

You get the idea.

[10 min interview; ten min writing]

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Another important type of story

Worried about her weight, Sarah swore off dessert and cut back on meal portions. Eventually, she began skipping breakfast and was just nibbling at lunch and dinner.

A weight-loss success story? Not at all. Sarah is only 10 years old. Her diet cost her 20 percent of her weight.

Children such as Sarah, a Philadelphia 4th-grader who's too embarrassed to let her real name be used, are at the forefront of a disturbing new trend affecting the health of U.S. children: dieting.

Around the country, children as young as 6 are shedding pounds, afraid of being fat and increasingly being treated for eating disorders that threaten their health and growth, health specialists report.

In trying to correct one problem — one in five children is now overweight — doctors, parents, schools, and the media have unwittingly caused another.

'This whole pressure to be thin has backfired on children,' said Joanne Ikeda, a dietitian at the University of California at Berkeley who counsels parents and health professionals about children and weight issues.

'It's a national crisis,' said Frances Berg, editor of Obesity and Health, a North Dakota journal that reports the latest scientific research on obesity.

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Another important type of story we'll write: The news feature

- Excellent for news analysis or trend stories

Lede:

- Anecdote or scene or portrait (compare: first scene of movie!).

Nut graf:

- Provides context by summarizing the essence, or “nut,” of the story’s theme.
- Is a core statement that answers the basic question in the reader’s mind: “Why should I read this story?”

After the nut graf:

- Retelling the story in more details, answering questions in the reader’s mind

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Homework

- **Rewrite** the compressor press release [until Wednesday Oct 10]
- **Write an analysis** (about 500 words long) of that short news article from *The Guardian*, looking at news structure and language criteria [until next Friday Oct 12]