Non-traditional Communication Assignments

Writing Across the Curriculum+ Program
February 21, 2017
Workshop Outline

• Introductions
• What communication skills do students need?
• Non-traditional communication assignments
• UBC resources
• Summary, educator resources, workshop survey
Workshop Objectives

By the end of today’s workshop you will be able to:

1. Identify a variety of non-traditional communication assignments that have been used in science courses and discuss benefits and challenges for each;

2. Plan how you might apply non-traditional communication assignments into your course(s), including how you would assess them; and

3. Recognize resources at UBC for the implementation of such assignments.
Teaching communication skills in the university classroom

Using the table provided, brainstorm on the following statements:

Keeping in mind the wide variety of paths that a science student can take both during their degree and after, list some communication activities that you could see them doing.

How are you currently teaching the skills required for these activities?

Be prepared to share with the larger group.
Non-traditional communication assignments

• Press releases
• Blogs and other social media
• Wikis
• Videos and podcasts
Press releases

A short (e.g. 300-500 words) written piece providing journalists with basic information about a piece of news (e.g. research at UBC).

Press releases - Benefits

• Allows students to practice with an authentic assignment for science communication
  – Helps students think about science in the news

• Develops skills for writing to a non-specialist audience
  – Helps students to translate science into jargon-free language
  – Exposes students to science communication

• Introduces a different format and style than typical science writing
  – Emphasizes concise writing
  – Provides practice summarizing information and focusing on the main points
  – Demonstrates student comprehension of complex subjects
Press releases – Example Assignments

• Experiment, scientific article and one-page press release (Materials Science, Widstrand et al. 2001)
  – Writing reviewed by peers and by writing fellows hired for the class

• Press release for a scientific article (Biology, Robin Young BIOL200, UBC ScWRL Website)
  – Changed from writing a scientific essay; students participate in a science writing workshop

• Starting with a news article (Astronomy, ASTRO322 University of Alberta)
  – Students choose an astronomy media story, find the original article, summarize and write a press release
Press releases – Assignment Tips

• Train students to write in this format and style
  – E.g. workshop on difference in language between press release and scientific article; jargon activity
  – Provide example press releases

• Allow for practice to help students balance the science content and language

• Help students focus on the important content for a press release and build their story
  – E.g. 3 question worksheet (Kross); inverted pyramid style

• Support students in reading the scientific articles
  – E.g. how are they structured, how to identify information to use, how to reference
Press releases - Assessment

• Criteria to consider in the assessment:
  – Scientific content
  – Organization/structure
  – Grammar/m mechanics of writing
  – Style (e.g. written in journalistic style)
  – Headline (e.g. catchy, positive and specific)
  – Lead (e.g. draws in reader, 1-3 sentences max)
  – News value (e.g. clear why it was written)
Science for sweet tooths

Media Release | November 29, 2016

UBC’s Xiaonian Lu and Yaxi Hu are testing antioxidant levels in raw cocoa beans to chocolate bars. Photo: Martin Dee

UBC researchers develop new method to test for antioxidants in chocolate

Food scientists at the University of British Columbia have developed a faster and cheaper way to quantify antioxidant levels in chocolate. It’s a method they plan to use in new research to help uncover when antioxidant levels rise and fall during the manufacturing process, from raw cocoa beans to chocolate bars.

Blogs and other social media

Blog: A website containing entries written in an informal, conversational style. Entries may be on a topic or set of topics and may contain text, images, data, and videos.

Source: ScWRL Website - http://scwrl.ubc.ca/2016/05/09/a-big-classroom-is-no-barrier-to-teaching-science-writing-lessons-from-the-front-lines/
Blogs and other social media - Benefits

• Develops skills for writing online for non-specialists

• Introduces a different format and style
  – Conveying science topics in a conversation
  – Writing in a more personal and informal style, need to engage the reader
  – Online is more dynamic, can include hyperlinks to content
  – Opportunity to include other media (e.g. photos, video clips, etc.)
  – Can be low-stakes writing (e.g. reflective writing, journal)

• Allows for direct interaction with audience
  – E.g. With peers, can increase student engagement if have responsibility to read and comment
  – May encourage students uncomfortable speaking in class
  – Can increase student interest and ownership for learning
Blogs and other social media – Example Assignments

• Communicating controversial science (Science communication, Leach, University of Queensland)
  - Blog entries commented on a variety of issues related to a scientific controversy, used as a tool for thinking and analysis for essay and presentation
Blogs and other social media – Example Assignments

• Critiquing statistics in news articles on Twitter (graduate school introductory statistics, Everson et al. 2013)
  – 10 posts of links to different news articles, link to course content and critique
  – e.g. IQ and exercise. A huge sample size of 1.2 million, but no women in the sample! http://bit.ly/6B55g1
  #epsy5261.

• Sharing field observations on Twitter (Ornithology course, Margaret Rubega, University of Connecticut)
  – Tweet at least 5 times about observations of bird behaviour, include location information and relate to course content (#birdclass)
Blogs and other social media – Assignment Tips

• Determine the purpose of the assignment and stick to it
  – Learning or interacting, argument or commentary or community
  – Establish relevance for students and recommend blogs or Twitter feeds to follow

• Train students to write in this format and style
  – Discuss what makes good blog entries
  – Highlight examples of good blogs
  – How to use hyperlinks in their blog and distinguish the quality (e.g. peer-reviewed literature vs. other bloggers)

• Scaffold learning and allow for practice to help students build their skills
  – Try focusing on particular elements in different blogs (e.g. writing style, then visual aids, etc.,)
Blogs and other social media – Assignment Tips

• Monitor posts and participate in discussions
  – Ensure polite behavior and prevent bullying
  – Make sure students know the policy on what is acceptable

• Be aware of issues of privacy and safety with the use of public sites
  – Give students the opportunity to speak to you privately about concerns and provide an alternative assignment
  – Encourage use of pseudonyms and avoid posting private information

• Do not assume that students are tech savvy
  – Have conversations/training about online privacy (e.g. UBC Digital Tattoo Project)
  – E.g. privacy settings on Facebook for posting with a hidden profile
Blogs and other social media - Assessment

• Criteria to consider in the assessment:
  – Opinion/argument within the post
  – Text layout and use of graphics (e.g. images/audio/video)
  – Hyperlinks
  – Appropriate referencing/attribution
  – Tags
  – Comments/discussion
Rating Characteristics

4 Exceptional. The blog post is focused and coherently integrates examples with explanations or analysis. The post demonstrates awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. The entry reflects in-depth engagement with the topic.

3 Satisfactory. The blog post is reasonably focused, and explanations or analysis are mostly based on examples or other evidence. Fewer connections are made between ideas, and though new insights are offered, they are not fully developed. The post reflects moderate engagement with the topic.

2 Underdeveloped. The blog post is mostly description or summary, without consideration of alternative perspectives, and few connections are made between ideas. The post reflects passing engagement with the topic.

1 Limited. The blog post is unfocused, or simply rehashes previous comments, and displays no evidence of student engagement with the topic.

0 No Credit. The blog post is missing or consists of one or two disconnected sentences.

Source: ProfHacker Blog
http://www.chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/a-rubric-for-evaluating-student-blogs/27196
Wikis

A website whose content and structure can be edited by multiple people.

Source: UBC Wiki - http://wiki.ubc.ca/
Wikis - Benefits

• Authentic experience in contributing to online knowledge-building (if using Wikipedia)
  – Contribution is accessible by the online community
  – Receive feedback on their work from other editors
  – Collaborate with a community of editors

• Introduces a different format and style for a non-specialist audience
  – Writing from a neutral point of view
  – Formal tone and plain language
  – Demonstrates student comprehension of complex subjects

• Encourages students to critically analyze online information and reflect on the sources
  – Students think critically about what they put online
Wikis – Example Assignments

• Wikipedia assignments can take a variety of forms
  – Write an article or make significant edits
  – Copy-edit an article
  – Add images to an article
  – Search for information gaps in an article
  – Add citations to an article
  – Contribute to UBC Wiki
    • Source: Wiki Education Foundation - http://tinyurl.com/zb622r3

• Contribute or enhance a Wikipedia page on a Canadian topic in ecology, climate change or sustainability (Biology, Rosie Redfield BIOL345 UBC)
Wikipedia: Wiki Ed/University of British Columbia/BIOL 345 Human Ecology (Term 2)

This course is an automatically-updated version of the main course page at dashboard.wikiedu.org. Please do not edit this page directly; any changes will be overwritten the next time the main course page gets updated.

Human Ecology is a participatory project-based course for upper-level students who are not biology majors. Each student designs and carries out three projects: a short talk for YouTube, a small community project, and creation or enhancement of a Wikipedia page about a Canadian topic in ecology, climate change or sustainability. The Wikipedia work is done by teams of two students.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Assigned</th>
<th>Reviewing</th>
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<td>Tvenuti</td>
<td>Rainwater harvesting in Canada, User:Tvenuti/sandbox</td>
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<td>Asiaawico</td>
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<td>Sychev</td>
<td>Independent power production in British Columbia, User:Sychev/sandbox</td>
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<td>Everett Crowley Park, User:Mi. Chau123/sandbox</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annissekim</td>
<td>Independent power production in British Columbia, User:Sychev/sandbox</td>
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</table>

Source: Redfield BIOL345 Wiki

Wikis – Assignment Tips

• Consider where you will build the content
  – Contribute outside UBC (Wikipedia or WikiEdu)
  – Have a complex assignment, want to track student progress, use a template (WikiEdu)
  – More protected space, e.g. students writing about original research (UBC Wiki)

• Assist students to select appropriate articles or topics
  – Choose a topic that is well-established (not rated “start” or “stub” class on Wikipedia)
  – Students can review peers’ work on Wikipedia and leave reviews online or offline

• Introduce students to Wikipedia (or Wikis), including appropriate behavior as part of a community of collaborating editors
Wikis - Assessment

• Criteria to consider in the assessment
  – Peer reviews and collaborations with peers
  – Quality of main contributions
  – Organization
  – Text layout
  – Hyperlinks
  – Graphics and multimedia
  – Citations
Videos and podcasts

Digital audio and video files made available online.

Source: YouTube Website - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8Y4H1bWprA
Videos and podcasts - Benefits

• Allows students to practice with an authentic assignment for science communication

• Develops multiple communication skills
  – Writing for scripts, possibly conducting interviews
  – Oral communication (podcasts)
  – Visual and communication in multiple medias (video)
  – Analyze an audience and tailor communication

• Can be used as a peer-teaching tool
  – Extend class content to bigger picture
  – Students need to demonstrate understanding of complex subjects
  – Increases understanding of some concepts and exam performance (Pegrum et al. 2015)
Videos and podcasts - Benefits

• Students are motivated by creating a novel and interesting product
  – Allows for creativity
Videos and podcasts – Example Assignments

• Video documentary assignment (Biology, Kuchel et al. 2014)
  – Groups produce 4-5 min video on an environmental issue, emphasis on biological content

• Podcast on core chemistry concepts (Chemistry, Bartle et al. 2010)
  – 3 min podcast on acids/bases or oxidation/reduction, loaded on class WebCT site, minor assignment

• Share projects or learning from the course (Psychology, Rawn PSYC 208; Capstone Design Projects, Engineering)
  – One option for groups of students to share with peers what they discovered or accomplished during the term
Science 300 Outreach Project - Novel Discoveries in Nuclear Physics

Source: YouTube Website - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8Y4HlbWprA
Videos and podcasts – Assignment Tips

• Provide technical training and ongoing support
  – Create your own first
  – Keep tools simple and inexpensive (e.g. campus tools)
  – Consider a live demo in class
  – Consider hiring help or accessing support on campus

• Consider privacy and copyright issues
  – Make sure students understand which material they should and shouldn’t use (Fair Use Guidelines)
Videos and podcasts - Assessment

• Consider if you will grade production value (e.g. reading a paper versus interspersing music) and which elements are important (e.g. sound audible and clear)

• Criteria to consider in the assessment:
  – Storyboard or script
  – Content/organization (e.g. relevance, clarity)
  – Structure/flow
  – Effective use of language
  – Voice and audience
  – Technical competence (e.g. lighting, sound quality, music, colour, visual composition, camera motion, editing, graphics)
UBC Resources

• Blogs
  - UBC Blogs Support Website https://blogs.ubc.ca/support/
  - UBC Wiki Create a UBC Blogs Course Blog
    http://wiki.ubc.ca/Documentation:Connect/Create_a_UBC_Blogs_Course_Blog_(How_to)

• Wikis
  - UBC Wiki Using the UBC Wiki for Course Work
    http://wiki.ubc.ca/Help:Using_the_UBC_Wiki_for_Course_Work
  - UBC Wiki CTLT Teaching With Wikipedia

• Media
  - DIY Media http://diy.open.ubc.ca/ (e.g. Podcasting Basics -
    http://diy.open.ubc.ca/audio/create-it/podcasting-basics/)
UBC Resources

• Media
  - Learning Technology Hub Tool Guides http://lthub.ubc.ca/guides/
  - Learning Technology Support http://lthub.ubc.ca/support/

• Copyright at UBC - http://copyright.ubc.ca/

• Student Privacy
  - UBC Digital Tattoo Project http://digitaltattoo.ubc.ca/abouttheproject
UBC Digital Tattoo Project

• Partnership between UBC Library, Irving K. Barber Learning Centre, Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology, and U of T Faculty of Information and U of T Libraries.

• Project is based on connecting UBC community members to collaboratively explore what it means to be a digital citizen in the ever-shifting online environment

• Site includes resources for students like “Cultivating your online profile”, “Who owns your data?”

• #thinkb4U campaign this winter about allowing apps to access personal data and the implications
WAC+ Program Services

- Workshops
  - Teaching Succinct and Accurate Science Writing (Feb. 22)
  - Strategies for Student Success with Writing (Feb. 23)
  - Writing Assignment and Assessment Design
  - Providing Effective Feedback on Writing Assignments
  - Teaching Oral Communication in Science
- One-on-one consultations
- TA Training
- Class visits to discuss writing assignments
Contact the WAC+ Program

Email:  wac.coordinator@ubc.ca

Website:  http://scwrl.ubc.ca/wac
Workshop Objectives

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2. Plan how you might apply non-traditional communication assignments into your course(s), including how you would assess them; and

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References


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a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA