Writing Assignments for Unit 4
Workplace Literacy

“A first step in developing your expertise in on-the-job writing is to focus your attention on the two qualities that a workplace communication must have in order to be successful: usability and persuasiveness. Both qualities, of course, must be defined from the readers’ perspective.”

Unit Four Paper: Problem-Solving Letter Proposal +
Cover Memo Describing Its Rhetorical Situation

This is your chance to improve a small corner of your world. The assignment asks you to identify a problem and propose a solution to a person who has the power to implement the solution. Simple, right? Maybe. Here’s the challenge: does your addressee recognize that this problem that concerns you even exists? We’ll talk about ways to handle that detail. The choice will be yours: Has the addressee requested your recommendation? Along with the letter proposal you are to compose a brief, one-paragraph memo that describes the situation—the rhetorical situation—that is calling you to write.

Important specifications: Business letter format, 2 pages, single-spaced (one-line spaces bet. ¶s).

Due Date for Peer Review: Thurs., Apr. 24
Due Date for Submission to Instructor and Oral Briefings: Tues., Apr. 29

Unit = 20% of final course grade
Letter = 75% of unit grade
Cover memo = 15% of unit grade
One-page handout for Venture Capital Project (group project) = 10% of unit grade

The Road to Success

1. Begin brainstorming a topic by identifying problems that you’ve encountered within a workplace—on the job, as a volunteer, as a customer or client or potential employee. (I have a strong preference for reading about off-campus problems.)
2. Narrow the list to problems that are rhetorical, i.e., that may be addressed via writing and speaking.
3. Narrow the list further by eliminating any problems that could only be resolved through a political process (e.g., lowering taxes or raising the minimum wage).
4. Now think about ideas for solving these problems: what is your objective, what is the specific action (i.e., solution) that you recommend? What are the anticipated outcomes of that action?
5. How can you most persuasively justify the wisdom and practicality of your solution? Choose one, two, or three strategies from page 481 of ABGW: argument from principle, from consequence, or from precedent/analogy.
6. Write, read, write, re-write, get feedback, and revise again. Check especially for the “you view” and short, direct, clear sentences of business prose.
7. Follow carefully the format guidelines for “Submitting Your Papers” on page 4 of the syllabus and the specific business formats addressed during this unit. Assemble portfolio, and submit

Short Writes and Informal Oral Briefings for Unit 4 will be assigned in an April 8 handout, which also includes (1) a checklist for the letter proposal, and (2) specifics about the Venture Capital project.
Checklist for Proposal Letters for Unit 4 Portfolio

☐ Cover memo identifies a real situation, and the real person who is addressed.
☐ Cover memo makes clear the (imagined) scenario giving rise to the proposal or report.
☐ Introduction follows direct or indirect approach as appropriate for reader and situation.
☐ Problem is clearly identified and explained with evidence (see WL, p. 15).
☐ Objectives (shared goals) for addressing the problem are laid out.
☐ Solution is proposed, making clear a method and resources (“how to” and costs)
☐ Rationale makes good use of justification arguments.
☐ Rationale demonstrates that benefits outweigh costs.
☐ Reader’s potential objections or counterarguments are addressed.
☐ Presentation is clear, usable, and persuasive throughout.
☐ Letter format is followed impeccably (memo format for cover memo).
☐ Entire presentation demonstrates writer’s ability to incorporate a reader-centered “you view.”
☐ Careful proofreading has resulted in error-free spelling, grammar, and punctuation, thus making an overall good impression on the reader.

Short Writes and Informal Oral Presentations for Unit 4

SW #1: Due Tues., Apr. 15. MEMO to Dr. Chappell with problem statement you will address in your letter proposal/report for the major Unit 4 paper. Follow the schema for an “A vs. B” statement on page 15 of Workplace Literacies. As indicated on the unit calendar, this memo will constitute an early topic lock-in for this unit. (Note: Please ignore the “P–O–P” advice on the unit calendar. Use Spilka’s A vs. B schema instead.)

SW #2, Version A, for the Venture Capitalist Money Board. Due Tues., April 15.
Create a one-page Request for Proposals handout that presents a bulleted list of criteria by which you will judge the competing proposals. To do this, you will have to decide whether you are interested in for-profit or non-profit proposals; i.e., are you the board of Venture Capitalists, Inc., or are you the board of the Venture Capital Foundation?

Format Specs for Board’s RFP:¹
Use a letterhead you create, and include the date, a main heading (Request for Proposals), and a brief, inviting paragraph indicating your overall purpose…ending in something like “successful proposals will meet the following criteria:”

• ....
• .... [and so on]

We’ll need 22 copies of all handouts.

¹ Specs = specifications
Content Specs for Board’s RFP:

1. I imagine that 5–6 criteria will be sufficient. Here you may want to lay out cause-effect or cost-benefit points as well as values you want to see enacted.
2. For guidance regarding the format of bulleted lists, see pp. 142–43 of the handbook.
3. For guidance regarding the content of the list items, ABGW’s discussion of the expert move they call “Division into Parallel Parts” may be helpful.
4. Note that both books stipulate that items in a bulleted list must be in parallel grammatical form.
5. I suggest that you take ABGW’s points about categories of justification arguments into account. See pp. 475–480, assigned reading for April 15.

SW #2, Version B, for the Venture Capital Proposal Teams. Due Tues., April 22.

Create a one-page handout supporting your funding proposal that follows the A-B-C organizational model.

Format Specs for Proposal Handouts:
As above, use a letterhead you create, giving your group a name. Include on the sheet a date and a main heading that identifies your project (similar to a subject line in a memo). Use the footer to list the names of your group members.

Content Specs for Proposal Handouts:

1. Use the A-B-C proposal model.
2. For the benefits section, meet the cause-effect, cost-benefit, values, and justification criteria laid out by the money board.
3. For the costs section, make up a basic budget for materials and salaries for X number of years. (You might do some Web or newspaper research [via ProQuest or Lexis] to see what kinds of projects get funded, at what levels, for both/either profit and nonprofit groups.)

Procedures for Presentations to Board/Class on Tues., Apr. 22

1. Groups will draw lots to see who presents first, second, etc.
2. Each group will have a maximum of 10 minutes, including Q and A (7:3?), for its pitch.
3. Board will be allowed 10 minutes of conferral time out in the hall while the rest of us chit-chat nervously, hoping for a favorable outcome.
4. Board will announce its funding decision and explain orally its rationale.