



## **ENGR 502x: Writing Skills for Engineering Ph.D. Students**

Instructor: Elizabeth Fife, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Technical Communication  
Practice Engineering Writing Program (EWP)

Office: OHE 106R

fife@usc.edu

Course website: [www.usc.edu/dept/engineering/ewp](http://www.usc.edu/dept/engineering/ewp)

### **Objectives**

This course is designed to help graduate students in engineering and science with their academic and professional writing. Through short writing assignments you will learn to:

- Effectively transmit and articulate ideas and findings to your research community as well as to professional and general audiences
- Continue developing your writing skills independently to further improve beyond this course
- Gain control of your written communications and develop your academic voice

Specifically, you will master the language, style, structures, and forms that are used in academic communication. Professional conventions, language and structures for journal articles, conference papers, dissertations, research proposals, and presentations will be examined and put into practice.

Seminar-style classes will introduce topics and support readings and assignments; in-class workshops will give you the opportunity to initiate your writing efforts and get feedback. Class time will also be used to discuss your current work, and to evaluate a variety of scientific and engineering writing.

Individual writing assessment will provide you with specific guidance on setting goals, planning, organizing ideas, as well as grammar, language and syntax issues. Peer review in the class will allow you to discuss and reflect on your own work, hear other perspectives and share the communication challenges of transmitting ideas to different audiences.

This course emphasizes the process of writing and the importance of continued practice throughout the semester and beyond. You will learn to apply methods that will enable you to further advance in the future to become a more effective writer and collaborator.

## **Assignments**

Small writing assignments ranging in length from a paragraph to one page in length are assigned at regular intervals throughout the 7-week session. Next, each student has the opportunity to give a presentation of their current research to the class. Adjusting your content to meet audience needs is emphasized.

Finally, you are encouraged to bring conference papers, journal articles, lab reports, grant proposals, dissertation proposals, abstracts, written correspondence (email, letters), PPT presentations, and other written materials into the class.

You are invited to consult with the professor in and outside of class for assistance with your individual writing tasks, e.g. dissertations, journal papers, conference papers.

In class we cover the basic elements and strategies for writing journal articles, review articles, conference papers, academic and professional funding proposals, and finally professional documents, including reports, process descriptions, technical descriptions, and curriculum vitae.

In sum, the activities in 502x are intended to support your ongoing writing tasks and to prepare you for the demands of professional communication.

## **Evaluation Policies**

This course is Credit/No Credit. Credit for this course is based on the following criteria:

- Attending class meetings
- Participating in discussions and writing activities
- Completing an in-class presentation and the writing assignments
- *Optional (but strongly suggested)* - identify a writing project of your own to work on in parallel with the course (journal article, dissertation chapter, research proposal, etc.)

\*This course is supportive of your Ph.D. research and writing, and as such, there is flexibility with assignments in terms of deadlines and substitution of any standard assignment with your current work in progress. You can always turn in assignments late and you can make up classes that you miss. Let me know if this is needed so we can make a plan that will work out for you.

## **PLAGIARISM**

The USC Viterbi School of Engineering adheres to the University's policies and procedures governing academic integrity. Students are expected to be aware of and to observe the academic integrity standards described in SCampus. These standards will be enforced in this class on all assignments. All cases of plagiarism will be addressed with utmost seriousness. Students found to plagiarize will fail the course and be referred to the Student Conduct Board.

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged and inappropriate use of the ideas or wording of another individual . . . [It] is considered a grave violation of academic integrity and the sanctions against it are correspondingly severe. (University sanctions range from a grade of F in the course to suspension from the university.) Most simply, plagiarism can be characterized as 'academic theft.' As defined in the University Student Conduct Code (published in the current SCampus), plagiarism includes: 'The submission of material authored by another person but represented as the student's own work, whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near verbatim form; 'The submission of material subjected to editorial revision by another person that results in substantive changes in content or major alteration of writing style; and 'The improper acknowledgment of sources in essays or papers.'

The Student Conduct Code applies these standards to any written work submitted by a student, whether a draft or a final version. Because of the serious penalties for plagiarism, you should ensure that any writing you submit represents your own assertions and abilities and incorporates other texts in an open and honest manner. In academic assignments, writing is assumed to be the original words and thoughts of the student unless [the reader is] told otherwise (i.e.: material from other sources is clearly and properly cited). From Trojan Integrity: Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism (USC Office for Student Conduct, rev. Fall 2000, pp. 2-3)

## **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me early in the semester. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.