

DRAFT SYLLABUS

Winter 2003
ED 898-007

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SEMINAR: Developing Professional Writing

Instructor:

	Deborah Ball
Office phone	734-647-3713
Cell phone	734-972-4793
Email	dball@umich.edu

Group email: prose07@umich.edu

Class meetings:

Wednesdays, 4 – 6 pm

January 8, 22, 29, February 5, 12, 19, March 5, 19, 26, April 2, 9 (*underlined dates are proposed as additional, above what would normally be scheduled – feedback requested on this proposal*)

Room 2340 School of Education Building

Course Overview

The purposes of the professional development seminars are to provide space for the development of specific professional and scholarly practices and knowledge. Examples might include writing, reviewing manuscripts, making presentations, writing book reviews or commentaries intended to be read by a general public, developing familiarity with common resources and literatures.

This term, our focus will be on writing. The seminar's design is premised on the recognition that you can already write, and have written for a variety of purposes, both professionally and personally, but that there is additional learning to do for the sorts of professional writing that lie ahead of you. Graduate school — and scholarly work — steadily and centrally require writing. You will be challenged to write for many different purposes. You will produce scholarly papers, course syllabi, manuscript and proposal reviews, letters, and many email messages. Learning to write in new ways, and to develop a sense of taste about good writing, exposition, analysis, word choice, sentence structure, paragraph composition, voice, purpose, and argument, is thus a crucial part of your development. Becoming more fluent and skilled with the array of types of writing will be important. This seminar is designed to provide opportunities for you to work on your writing, deal with predictable challenges, and develop skills with a variety of genres.

We will work on several fronts. The work we will do is intended to help you develop your writing now, and to develop resources and practices for continuing to improve your writing over time. We will focus our attention on three areas of writing *processes* and *products*:

- a) Predictable problems of writing: audience/purpose; word usage and choice; sentence structure and composition; style; clarity; grammar; spelling; paragraphs; overall structure and “story line”
- b) Specific genres of professional writing that you will do as a graduate student and beyond

- c) Habits and practices for writing (e.g., for conquering resistance, getting unstuck, improving your writing)

This seminar is also designed to help you cultivate practices and stances that contribute to disciplined scholarly and professional work. These include how you think, analyze, argue, and write, how you keep track of your ideas as well as others' and ours, and how you use texts, discussions, interactions, people, and experiences, to help yourself develop. It also involves developing new practices as a learner.

Some of the experiences in which we will likely engage include

- learning to *observe* writing (much as improving one's teaching is supported by observing teaching);
- interacting with expert writers (including Richard Colvin, newspaper journalist, and Suzanne Wilson, education scholar; faculty and senior colleagues at the University of Michigan)
- revising and editing short texts together
- studying the biography of a published research article from draft, through submission and review, resubmission, final polishing, and final publication
- self-assessment and stock-taking of own writing practices and products
- identifying common misuses, misspellings, unfortunate constructions of language and text

The seminar should also function as an opportunity for you to build and participate in an intellectual community with others in the graduate program. Each of you comes to this group with different experiences, interests, perspectives, and expertise. Who we are and what we bring to the seminar can be resources for the course, if we learn to make use of them, and of one another. The projects of becoming familiar with some of the major resources for writing in our field, of learning how some of our senior colleagues write and improve their writing, are designed deliberately as a common endeavor. If we are successful, each person's learning will be enhanced by the work of others in the group.

Building the culture of the class so that genuine inquiry is possible will take all of our efforts to make the seminar a context in which in which people listen and are listened to, in which evidence matters, in which thoughtful questioning of one another's claims is desirable, and in which alternative perspectives and interpretations are valued. How we listen to others' reactions to our ideas, accommodate critique and questions, change our minds and revise at some times -- all will affect the intellectual culture of the class. Writing is one of the areas in which graduate students (and mature scholars, too, at times) feel vulnerable. Finding a helpful balance of support and challenge for one another is therefore an important goal.

We therefore will need to work attentively on norms for the class. Listening carefully, treating ideas with respect and interest, raising and responding to questions, sharing the floor — all these will matter in constructing an environment where satisfying and challenging intellectual work can take place.

Seminar Requirements

1. Participation in class: Because we are treating this as a *professional development* seminar, every person's participation is important. One major source and context of your learning is one another — your experiences, questions, ideas, interests. In many ways, having a course like this is a luxury — many graduate programs do not offer such a course. It is important that you treat the seminar as a serious commitment, both in terms of being here every week and being here on time, as well as being prepared for and engaged in class. We will begin promptly at 4:00 p.m. and will end no later than 6:00 p.m.

2. Interview of an experienced scholarly writer: Together with one or two other members of our group, you will interview a faculty member or senior colleague about his or her writing. Based on that interview, you will extract ideas that could be useful to the group and represent them for others in a usable form. We will plan and design how to do this together. I am asking specific people from among whom I would like you to make a choice.
3. Selecting two resources to develop your writing: Across the semester, we will browse and explore a variety of resource materials —books, manuals, handbooks — and consider what sorts of support they offer. I will bring materials to class for you to examine. I will ask you to comment in class about materials you have explored, and by the end of the term, I would like you to have selected — and, if possible, have purchased — two new resources for your bookshelf, resources that you deem to offer you particularly useful help for your writing. Please produce for distribution to your colleagues and me a short annotated bibliographic listing for each of your two resources. In preparation for this, please first draft your short bibliography, complete with correctly formatted citation and short, helpful annotation, and submit to me. I will ask each of you to read and provide feedback to one of these drafts for a classmate. Each of you will therefore receive two sets of comments on these – one from me and one from a peer. After receiving comments, please revise your annotated bibliography and turn it in to me for compilation and distribution to the rest of the group.
4. Regular short inquiry and practice assignments: I will ask you to do short tasks outside of our meeting time. Examples include small editing tasks, observing pieces of writing, short readings, keeping track of some aspect of language, text, or writing practice. The purpose of these is to provide you with opportunities for independent practice, investigation, and reflection, as well as to prepare ideas or material for us to use together in our group sessions. Tasks will be designed with sensitivity to burden on your time and payoff in terms of your learning.

Note: This syllabus is a draft. Please send comments and suggestions by Monday January 20 to dball@umich.edu.