Introduction to Professional Writing
(Spring Semester 2011 WRA 202, section 01)

Meetings: Mondays & Wednesdays, 10:20 to 11:40 a.m., Bessey 317
Instructor: Shreelina Ghosh, Department of Writing, Rhetoric & American Cultures
Contact: Bessey 295 | ghoshsh2@msu.edu
Office hours: Wednesday 12:30 to 2:30 & by appointment

INTRODUCTION
WRA 202 will introduce you to the rhetorical principles and professional practices of professional writers. The class will also introduce you to the skills and tools you’ll need to succeed in your other PW classes:

- In this class, we will address questions like: What does “professional writing” mean for different people? What can it mean for you?
- What kinds of things do professional writers do? Where and how do they do these things? Put another way, in a world where most people write, what does it mean to be a professional writer?
- What is the professional writing major at Michigan State University? What should you expect from that major?
- What are the core concepts of professional writing (such as culture, community, and technology), and what might each mean?
- What kinds of genres, design principles, digital technologies, and research skills should professional writers be familiar with?

COURSE GOALS
After WRA 202, you will be familiar with:

- various rhetorical principles and how they can be put to use by professional writers
- the different document types and genres professional writers produce
- a range of strategies for doing research—including gathering materials, synthesizing different ideas, analyzing audiences, and conducting surveys

Some of the activities we will focus on include:

- analyzing rhetorical situations (purpose and audience, goals, ethical issues)
- analyzing audiences (readers and users of your documents)
- planning and managing projects (including coordinating tasks, collaborating with others, setting and meeting milestones, and testing and evaluating results)

After WRA 202, you will have produced:

- a writing audit and rhetorical analysis
- a report and presentation on a core issue related to professional writing
- an audience assessment and content analysis
- a report to pass along to other PWers
- a resume and a plan for your professional portfolio

TEXTS AND MATERIALS
All other class materials (slideshows, videos, handouts, etc.) will also be available on ANGEL. I recommend Brief McGraw-Hill Handbook (2009 MLA Update) by Elaine Maimon, Janice Peritz, Kathleen Yancey. You may use some other handbook or online resource like Purdue OWL.
ESSENTIALS FOR A PASSING GRADE IN THIS COURSE

- Regular attendance,
- Active participation in workshop/editing activities, peer reviews and discussions,
- Completion of all major projects, revised and edited, along with collected “process” materials and progress memos.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance, Punctuality & Late Submission
Because this is a class that requires collaboration and discussion, you are expected to attend and be prepared. If you miss class, you are still responsible for obtaining class notes and completing work you missed. Absence in four physical meetings will be forgiven. Your final grade for the course will be lowered 0.5 points for each additional unexcused absence.

There are legitimate reasons to miss class. If you know in advance that you must miss class, you must contact me and others with whom you are working before your absence to coordinate future activities. Being late for class or leaving early is considered unprofessional and will count as an absence.

The due date of each paper is mentioned in the agenda. The policy for late paper submission is—NO LATE SUBMISSION. However, if you are faced with a personal or medical emergency and have already turned in one late assignment you will need to make arrangements with me at least two days in advance. I reserve the right to grant or decline late submission requests. Late papers will only be accepted if we have made previous arrangements.

Revision and development workshops: Since this course assumes that good writing develops with revision, we will spend time in class working on drafts of essays/projects.

Back up for work: Make sure to make multiple back-ups of your assignments in your AFS space and flash drives.

Format: You may write your assignments in MSWORD documents – Times New Roman – double spaced – font size 12 – one inch margins on all sides.

Academic Honesty: You are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, lab work, quizzes, tests and exams, without assistance from any online or off-line source or individual. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course. Also, you are not authorized to use the www.allmsu.com Web site to complete any course work in (insert course number here). Students who violate MSU academic integrity rules may receive a penalty grade, including a failing grade on the assignment or in the course. Contact your instructor if you are unsure about the appropriateness of your course work. (See also http://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/dishonestyFAQ.html)

Americans with Disabilities Act: MSU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discriminations, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). If you have a disability that could affect your performance in this class or that requires an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act, see me as soon as possible so that we can make appropriate arrangements.
ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

This course will revolve around four major projects, each of which is likely to include a set of smaller assignments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>% of Final Grade</th>
<th>Full Score</th>
<th>Due date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project 1: What is Professional Writing?</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Rhetorical Analysis: 50</td>
<td>1/26</td>
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<td>Report: 50</td>
<td>2/9</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Presentation: 25</td>
<td>2/16</td>
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<td>Full Score: 125</td>
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<td>Project 2: Promoting PW to Employers</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Audience Profile: 25</td>
<td>2/28</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work-plan: 25</td>
<td>3/2</td>
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<td>Promotional Document: 100</td>
<td>3/23</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Full Score: 125</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project 3: Documentation</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Audience Profile: 25</td>
<td>3/30</td>
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<td>Work-plan: 25</td>
<td>4/4</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Documentation: 100</td>
<td>4/18</td>
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<td>Full Score: 125</td>
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<td>Project 4: Portfolio</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Résumé-in-progress: 30</td>
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<td>Portfolio Plan: 45</td>
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<td>Full Score: 75</td>
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<td>Participation/ attendance</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>500</td>
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The final course grade will convert to the University’s 4-point scale as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your Total Score on 500</th>
<th>Final Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>467.5-500</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>432.5-467.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>397.5-432.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>372.5-397.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>347.5-372.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>322.5-347.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>297.5-322.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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Points will be assigned, generally, on the following criteria (but specific criteria will be presented for each project):

- **Excellent/strong**: Written work reveals strong professional writing skills and a deep understanding of rhetorical principles as applied to professional writing contexts; exceptional content knowledge, research, and preparedness; only very few minor editorial adjustments needed in documents.

- **Good**: Written work reveals adequate/acceptable professional writing skills and a basic understanding of rhetorical principles as applied to professional writing contexts; good content knowledge, research, and preparedness; several minor editorial adjustments needed in documents.
• **Acceptable:** Written work reveals less than adequate professional writing skills and/or difficulties understanding and applying rhetorical principles; occasional evidence of inadequate or inconsistent content knowledge, research, preparedness; major editorial problems in documents.

• **Poor:** Written work reveals significant problems in terms of writing ability and/or major misunderstanding of rhetorical principles as applied to professional writing contexts; frequent evidence of inadequate or inconsistent content knowledge, research, preparedness.

**RESOURCES AND SERVICES**

- MSU Writing Center: [http://writing.msu.edu](http://writing.msu.edu). 432-3610. 300 Bessey Hall. Primary writing resource on campus. WC has satellite centers in several campus locations including the main library.
- MSU ESL Lab: [http://www.elc.msu.edu](http://www.elc.msu.edu). 353-0800. 714 Wells Hall. Designed to assist international students with writing in a second language.
- MSU Learning Resource Center: [http://lrc.msu.edu](http://lrc.msu.edu). Offers individualized assistance to help students develop successful learning strategies and study habits.
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Schedule

Week 1
M 1/10  • Introduction to WRA 202  
W 1/12  • Read Covino, “Grammars of Persuasion.” Discuss: “What is rhetoric and its relevance for PW?”  
   • Begin Project One: overview, how to find an organization, how to select materials from that organization

Week 2
M 1/17  No Class (University Holiday)  
W 1/19  • Read DeVoss & Julier, “Profile of Professional Writing at MSU”  
   • Read entries from “In the Workplace” from the http://beyondwordsblog.com/  
   • Discuss the purpose of memos, templates and options for formatting a memo  
   • Discuss options for organizing Part A; introduction to Part B; how to find professional writers

Week 3
   • In-class review of Project One Part A  
   • Discuss purposes and qualities of effective review; experiment with Eli  
W 1/26  • Read Harris, “Professional Thinking”; Princeton Review, “A Day in the Life of a Writer”; Alvina, “A Day in the Life of an Editor”; Grillone, “Checking for Commas”; and “A Day in the Life of a Web Developer” (read at least two of the six articles)  
   • Submit revised version of Part A

Week 4
   • Discuss hallmarks of an effective information report; reporting information  
W 2/2   • Participate in Panel Discussion: “What is Professional Writing?”  
   • Review Project One rubric

Week 5
M 2/7   • Read Alton, “First Time Out”

1 (1) Any changes to the schedule will be notified to you through email. (2) Unless mentioned otherwise, all deadlines are at 12 midnight of the due date.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Task</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-class review of Project One Part B</td>
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<tr>
<td>W 2/9</td>
<td>Read Markel, “Advantages &amp; Disadvantages of Collaboration”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Submit revised version of Part B; collaboration tips for Part C</td>
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<td><strong>Week 6</strong></td>
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<td>M 2/14</td>
<td>Dobrin, “Revising, Rewriting, and Editing”</td>
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<td>Present Part C in class; submit Project One</td>
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<td><strong>Week 7</strong></td>
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<td>M 2/21</td>
<td>Dobrin, “Revising, Rewriting, and Editing”</td>
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<td>W 2/23</td>
<td>Panel Discussion: Professional Writers in non-profits</td>
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<td>Review drafts of audience profiles</td>
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<td><strong>Week 8</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>M 2/28</td>
<td>Dobrin, “Revising, Rewriting, and Editing”</td>
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<tr>
<td>W 3/2</td>
<td>Complete work plan and goals; submit that plan by end of class</td>
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<td><strong>Week 9</strong></td>
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<td>No Class (Spring break)</td>
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<td><strong>Week 10</strong></td>
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<td>W 3/16</td>
<td>Dobrin, “Revising, Rewriting, and Editing”</td>
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<td>Review drafts of final deliverable</td>
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<td><strong>Week 11</strong></td>
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<td>T 3/21</td>
<td>Dobrin, “Revising, Rewriting, and Editing”</td>
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<td>R 3/23</td>
<td>Present design ideas in class</td>
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<td>Submit Project Two and reflection</td>
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<td>Begin Project Three. Discuss intellectual property. Begin audience profile</td>
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<td>Panel Discussion: PW Interns</td>
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<td><strong>Week 12</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>W 3/30</td>
<td>Dobrin, “Revising, Rewriting, and Editing”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Review drafts of final deliverable</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Form groups. Begin work plan and goals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Submit audience profile</td>
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</table>
### Week 13
- **M 4/4**
  - Susan Hilligoss, Tharon Howard, "Visual communication"
  - Create work plan and goals; **submit that plan by end of class**
- **W 4/6**
  - Work on creating documentation
  - Panel Discussion: Potential Employers

### Week 14
- **M 4/11**
  - Gregory, “Writing for the Web”
- **W 4/13**
  - Review documentation in class

### Week 15
- **M 4/18**
  - Complete final draft of documentation; **submit documentation and reflection by the end of class**
- **W 4/20**
  - Molisani, “Resume Secrets”
  - Begin Project Four. Discuss the purpose of résumés; begin developing your résumé

### Week 16
- **M 4/25**
  - Review résumés in class; discuss the purpose of portfolio project descriptions
- **W 4/27**
  - Review portfolio project descriptions in class

### Week 17
- **M 5/4**
  - 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. **Submit Project Four**
PROJECT ONE: WHAT IS PROFESSIONAL WRITING?

Objective:
The aim of this project is pretty straightforward: to research what "professional writing" might be. There will be scope for both individual and group work in this assignment. You will be observing how professional writing happens in the real world and also observing how the MSU program is designed to meet those needs. Your primary goal for this research is to develop a description and definition of professional writing: What is it? What are the key issues for the field at this time? What kind of work does the professional writer do? In what contexts? Examine how the program you are entering at MSU constructs its view of professional writing and the work of professional writers.

Deliverables:
Part A: Rhetorical Analysis
Part B: Report on the concept of professional writing
Part C: A brief presentation.

Description:

Part A: Rhetorical Analysis
For Part A, you will produce a 3- to 4-page report (in the form of a memo). You will first identify an organization or company for which you want to perform a writing audit. Then you will gather as many examples as you can of the external communication created and distributed by the organization. After you’ve gathered the materials, you’ll spend some time reviewing them and then generate a rhetorical analysis of the materials.

To begin Part A of this project, identify the organization or company for which you want to perform a writing audit. Then identify which materials you need to gather and how you will need to go about gathering them. Once you've gathered at least five pieces of external communication, you’ll begin your analysis. There are many ways to conduct a rhetorical analysis, but for this assignment, you will analyze the pieces for their audience, context, and purpose.

This report, presented in the form of a memo addressed to your classmates and me, should address:

- The organization. You might want to write about why you chose it, what their mission is, what they do, how they work, who they serve, etc.
- The analysis. Your analysis should address these questions: Who is the audience for each piece you examined? What's the context in which the organization wrote each piece? For what purposes is the organization writing each piece? You might want to analyze each piece individually, or you may be able to generate some overall comments and point to specific examples when necessary.
- The conclusions. Provide some summary analysis and conclusions. So what did you find? What did you learn? How well do you think this organization has situated itself through and in the materials you’ve gathered? Do their documents resonate with their mission and goals? Do their documents speak to their audience? Serve the purposes for which they appear to be intended?

Part B: Exploring the Concept of “Professional Writing”
For this 4-5 page report, you will explore professional writing from a few vantage points. You will research what professional writing means at Michigan State University and at other colleges and universities. You will also, most importantly, research what professional writers do, what they
produce, and what tools they use to do their jobs. To gather the information necessary for Part B, consider interviewing students and faculty: we have a great network of PW students, PW faculty, and PW alums—you might consider conducting some face-to-face, email, or IM interviews to gather materials, ask questions about documents produced, and find out what tools they use. You could review other writing programs; the Society for Technical Communication (stc.org) maintains a great database of writing programs in the US. You might start there and identify a couple of other academic programs to look at, and to analyze what those other programs promise and provide. Read about professional writers: we’ll read some “day in the life...” pieces, and you can also consult with trade magazines read by working professional writers.

Writing the Report for Part B
Getting a sense of the genre of informational reports is important, so that you best know how to structure the report, integrate the components of the report, and sculpt the language you use in the report. Your report should look like and read like a report (not an essay!). Suggested report sections and questions for you to contemplate as you work include:

- **Overview/Summary:** What is the overall purpose of this report? What are you doing, arguing, saying, suggesting, demonstrating, etc., in the report? Can you summarize the entire report in one paragraph (or 150 words, max)?

- **Introduction:** Provide some background and rationale for your focus: What is your focus? How does it relate to your field or profession? What do readers need to know to understand your report? What is the historical and/or cultural context for your focus? Why is your focus important or compelling, and worthy of attention?

- **Analysis and Results:** What findings do you have to present? What quotations or summaries do you have to support your findings? What examples do you have to support your findings?

- **Conclusions:** What conclusions can you draw about the work you’ve researched? The examples you’ve integrated? What are the implications of what you found for you and your career? What are the implications for the members of your field?

- **References:** Include the full citations for the work you’ve summarized and analyzed, quoted from or otherwise referenced in your report.

Note that these are just suggestions; you may find it helpful, useful, and/or interesting to include different sections in your report, or to structure your report contents differently. However you decide to organize your report, it must have a core focus. By this I mean, you might focus it by claiming that “professional writers are, above all, facilitators.” I would then support that point by providing comments and details about what it means to write on behalf of an organization, and help communicate that organization’s message—to facilitate the communication work of the organization through web site content, brochures, flyers, annual reports, media releases, and more. Having done the research, you should be able to say that “professional writing is...” or that “professional writers are...” and then support that claim with quotes, examples, details, and description.

**Part C: Brief Presentation**

For this brief (10 minutes or so; 10 slides or so) slideshow presentation, you will work with at least three other people to create a presentation on/about professional writing. You will select and merge the findings from your reports and shift those findings to a slideshow format. By doing this, you will gain practice in crafting informative slides that integrate main points, quotes, visuals, differently than you did in the written report.
**PROJECT TWO: PROMOTING PW TO POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS**

**Objective:**
The Professional Writing (PW) program at Michigan State University offers several promotional materials for students. One example is the flyer below, which appears on the PW website at https://www.msu.edu/~wrac/pw/. That flyer does a nice job of telling students the kinds of things they will learn to do, but that information doesn’t necessarily help employers understand the value that a professional writing student could bring to the workplace. Put another way, the flyer does not help employers see ways to benefit from the skills and sensibilities that professional writers offer.

Your goal in this project is to create some sort of piece that explains the value of PW for potential employers—especially for potential employers of PW interns. In order to help you create a piece, we will work through several steps, most of them culminating in written documents.

By completing this project, you will gain a better understanding of the PW program. After all, a great way to learn about something is to have to describe it to someone else. You’ll also get the chance to learn about other kinds of genres that professional writers create. And, because part of this project will be collaborative, you will have a chance to think critically about how collaborative writing projects can be managed. Most likely, we will also experiment with at least one genre designed to help facilitate collaborative projects.

**Deliverables:**
Part A: an audience profile (individual)
Part B: work-plan and goals (group)
Part C: Promotional Document (group)
Part D: project reflection (individual)

**Part A: an audience profile (individual)**
Audience profile you create should be a powerful tool for most professional writing projects. It is important to identify your target audience or the set of users that a system/document is intended for. Typical parameters of the target audience include: industry, computer experience, income, nationality, disability, recreational preference and age.

Your final product might be anything thing: a website, a business report, a usability report, a toy or a book case or an ad jingle or anything. Who will be using your website or tool? Who are your theories describing? Who will encounter your writing? Personas are archetypal definitions of your "typical users." Each persona should have three or four important goals that help focus the design of the document you will create. Keep in mind that goals and tasks are different: tasks are not
ends in themselves, but are merely things we do to accomplish goals. Not just any goals will do, though, so it's important to understand which types will help you make design decisions. Experience goals describe how the persona wants to feel when using a product. In the case of this project, the audience of course is a potential employer. Your job is to create four personas (each about one page long) keeping in mind the product that you will ultimately create as a group in the next part of this project.

The information you present should be polished, easy to understand, and in a consistent format. We will have a number of models to examine, critique, and extend. Think about the best way to exhibit your work as part of portfolio that presents your work to a variety of audiences including me, other students, other faculty in the department and, most importantly, key individuals in the network that constitutes your future professional or academic career.

Part B: work-plan and goals (group)
From the individual part of the project, you will have a pool of personas and it is probable that some of them will be almost duplicates. You will form a task-force of 4-5 people. Each team will have a project manager (communicate meeting dates, plans, decisions to team members), secretary (upload files in Angel in time, keep record of communications in meetings and with client) and presentation planner (in charge of the group presentation). We can decide on other positions like brand manager, technical coordinator, editor, art director etc. depending on the nature of your project. This is an opportunity to showcase your professionalism and rhetorical/marketing/ethical insight in your management process, end product and pitch.

Part C: Promotional Document (group)
As a group, you are to submit a document that can be presented to an employer. The format of this Promotional piece will be decided by your group. It can be a brochure, a brief movie, a webpage, a flyer, a book-marker or anything else. There may also be a presentation describing that final design (group).

Part D: project reflection (individual)
The reflection will not be directly graded. However, your grade for this entire project will be certainly influenced by this statement. Address these issues in your reflection:

- Many professional writing skills are not easily "captureable" in the written products that you produce in classes. How do you represent/capture the invisible work that is nonetheless critical to being an effective professional writer? (People in management and administration have this problem. How do you make administrative work, management work visible?)
- Here's a challenge: The overall product itself represents the work of 4 or 5 or more people. How do you represent your contribution to the project?
- Does your reflection (team and self evaluation) show your ability to reflect critically on what you have done and why? Critical reflection is obviously an important component of your work in the Professional Writing major. It is not enough to simply be a good writer or good web designer — you also have to understand what good writing is and be able to articulate that understanding, explain it to others, and, at times, argue for it. During the process of creating the product you need to be able to explain the rationale behind your choices: Why did you design it THAT way? How did you decide what users needed? What guided your content decisions, your design decisions?
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(Spring Semester 2011 WRA 202, section 01)

PROJECT THREE: EXPLAINING COPYRIGHT

Objective:
What is documentation?
Documentation is a common practice for professional writers—especially technical communicators. Although most of the documentation that you encounter in your life comes in the form of instructions, documentation means more than that. “To document” is a rhetorical act that is broader than instructional text. In other words, while you might think of documentation in terms of instructions, documentation is used to do lots of other things. In general, it can be used
- to teach
- to guide (procedures)
- to support the work of others (reference)

The reason for an assignment like this is not precisely to teach you how to write documentation. Although writing documentation is useful, the key intellectual issues at stake in this project are to learn how to research and understand users (which is an issue we explored in the previous project).

Why we’re doing this
As I’ve already mentioned, the key to this project is learning how to understand user needs through research. Thus, this project is designed to help you explore two key questions in detail: What kinds of things do professional writers do? And what kinds of research skills and methodologies should professional writers be familiar with? This project also introduces you to yet another kind of writing that many professional writers do.

Deliverable:
Part A: an audience profile (group)
Part B: work & usability plan and goals (group)
Part C: documentation (group)
Part D: project reflection (individual)

For this project, I ask you to produce a short piece of documentation. Specifically, I ask you to create some sort of “text” that helps faculty and students in the professional writing program at MSU to understand intellectual property law, and to work effectively within the boundaries of that law. The kind of text you create should depend on your understanding of your audience and the best medium for communicating with them about intellectual property—especially copyright. This is going to be a group project.
PROJECT FOUR: PORTFOLIO

Objective:
The Professional Writing program at MSU asks its majors to develop and maintain electronic portfolios of their work in the program. The E-Portfolio will serve as a professional portfolio for employment purposes, showing potential employers what you have learned, what skills and experiences you have as a professional writer.

Deliverable:
Part A: a résumé that you can both use and continue to update
Part B: a set of plans for your professional portfolio

Part A: a résumé-in-progress
Resumes are living documents—you will update yours regularly during your time as a PWer and beyond. For class, you'll turn in a polished version of your resume in progress. Formatting of the portfolio plan and tools document is entirely up to you. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to prepare these documents.

Part B: Portfolio Plan
In this assignment, you are not required to design web site. You can approach this assignment in one of two ways:

- If you are new to the major, just starting out, and do not yet have an e-portfolio, then your assignment is to create a plan for an e-portfolio.
- If you are an advanced student in the major, have already taken several courses in the major, and already have a professional e-portfolio, then you can opt to use this assignment as an opportunity to expand, develop, and revise your existing e-portfolio, adding in the work that you have done in WRA 202.

In the document that you need to submit for this assignment, you will:

1. Review portfolios of at least three other PW students or alums. For each portfolio you review, write a brief summary of what you see, and then an analysis of what you see (for instance, identifying aspects you found useful, helpful, and sound, and perhaps aspects you found distracting, unnecessary, or unprofessional).
2. Generate a list of goals you have for your own portfolio—recommendations for yourself. Be as specific as you can at this point in time. You might include recommendations for how you will anchor yourself as a professional, or how you will distinguish yourself as a professional. You might include recommendations on what categories of work you will want to include in your portfolio. You might include recommendations about how your portfolio will look and “feel” (through color choice, layout, etc.).
# WRA 202 Intro to Professional Writing

## Student Name

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<th>COMPONENTS</th>
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