

MODULE ONE: WRITING AUDIT REPORT

Final Report Due by 11:59pm on Tuesday, 2/13 • 15% of final grade



OVERVIEW & OBJECTIVES

One of the best ways to start determining your place in professional writing is to examine the products of professional writers. To begin understanding what professional writing looks like, as well as to assess its effectiveness, it's necessary to look at a variety of media for a variety of audiences. **For this module, you will analyze a particular organization's communication strategies, seeking to understand how that organization has conversations with stakeholders through writing.**

You will select a company or an organization and examine their communication products (What writing is the group producing?) and strategies (How is the group setting itself apart from others? How are they reaching particular audiences?), creating a report called a **writing audit** that both analyzes and assesses the professional writing work being done there.

GETTING STARTED

Creating a communication audit involves **conducting research**. You will be analyzing various communication artifacts from the company or organization that you select, potentially including its...

- website (including main pages and sub-pages)
- publications (such as annual reports, newsletters, emails, catalogs, documentation, strategic plans, etc.)
- media interactions (press releases and media coverage, event announcements, etc.)
- social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, blogs, etc.)
- other key messages and elements of the company or organization's brand identity

The goal here is to be able to **articulate and critique** the company's communication strategy: the work of its professional writers. **You might look at the company's strategy as a whole, or you may focus your analysis on a specific instance or event: for example, a corporate crisis or critical incident.** This could be particularly helpful if you have an interest in technical or legal writing. Examples of such incidents include the October 2018 Boeing Lion Air crash, the Volkswagen emissions scandal, the early 2000s Firestone Tire controversy, or the 2018 decline of General Electric (GE). Regardless of your focus though, you should gather enough data that you can get a strong and complete sense of the company's goals for writing, and how it communicates with various stakeholders (both internal and external).

You can also conduct audience analysis for this project, though it's not required. This might involve identifying a participant or two who represent potential audience members for the company/organization you've selected, and then interviewing them about their experience with the company's writing, or asking them to interact with the company's website and social media.

Over the course of the module, you will identify strengths and weaknesses of your chosen group's writing, in order to compose a detailed report. Your analysis will need to include specific examples from the group's documents, in order to illustrate the claims and recommendations you make.

The final write-up of your observations and analysis should be 5–7 pages, written as a formal report to an internal audience (such as a communications team or upper management), including the following sections: overview, introduction, findings, and conclusions. The report should include tables, charts, and graphics (if and when necessary and appropriate).

WHAT WILL I TURN IN?

The deliverables and deadlines for Module 1 are...

Week 3	Sun 1/20	Proposal memo due by 11:59pm
Week 4	Sun 1/27	Progress report due by 11:59pm
Week 5	Fri 2/8	Draft report due for peer review in class (10:30am)
Week 7	Tues 2/13	Final report due with reflective memo to Blackboard by 11:59pm

We'll collaboratively generate grading criteria for Module 1 in class, but you should expect to at least be graded on...

- **Sustained analysis** of the various writing practices and genres of the group you've selected, using ample evidence to support the claims you make
- A **clear focus** on specific elements of the group's documents and strategies that demonstrate effective or ineffective writing practice
- An understanding of **genre conventions**: the report should be designed appropriately for the audience and purpose of a communications audit; clear attention should be paid to visual design principles and usability
- **Document preparation** that includes attention to detail, development of professional ethos, and careful editing/proofreading
- A completed **reflective memo** explaining the goals you had for this module and the deliberate rhetorical, visual, and methodological choices that you made in service of those goals (we'll talk more about how to write these later)