

Smart Phone Apps: A New Pedagogical Tool in Writing Courses

Chen Chen, Quincey Johnson
Towson University

Introduction

Research shows that smart phones have become standard equipment for today's college students in urban and suburban areas. Educational programs have also benefited from this ever-evolving technology, notably through mobile learning in which students learn using wireless devices such as mobile phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), or tablets, and smart phones (O'Malley et al., 2003). This project demonstrates the design and implementation of a smart phone application prototype created for teaching business writing to students at Towson University, Maryland. The phone application, called BUSXRubric, provides writing guidelines and resources that would not only enhance writing pedagogy but also encourage students to reflect on their writing process and writing assessment. The goal of this project is to promote more adaptations of m-learning in writing classes by introducing a new direction in the usages of smart phone applications for writing pedagogy. Through conducting surveys on students enrolled in the Business Cornerstone class at the University, we have found that the implementation of the prototype has yielded mostly positive results; however, questions are also raised as to how to improve the content and design of the application and how to promote the application to the students. What more can we do with smart phone applications?

Smart Phone Use is Pervasive among College-Aged Students

In recent years, telecommunication technologies—mobile and smart phones—have revolutionized the way people communicate. Calling a modern telecommunication device a phone might be considered a misnomer as these smart phones are used for more than just making phone calls but also checking emails, surfing websites, purchasing merchandise, and keeping calendars. College students, being the most prominent users of smart phones, have their social lives run by the little gadgets on their smart phones. Many studies have revealed the presence of smart phones in college students' lives. The highest smart phone penetration rate is between ages 25-34 with a 62% rate, followed by the 18-24 with a 53% penetration rate (Go-Gulf, 2012). A 2013 emarketer report, called College Students Adopt Mobile across the Board, said that 73% of college student own smart phones (Frederickson, 2013). The report predicts that the number of users will increase to 92 percent by 2016 (Frederickson, 2013). According to the CourseSmart study, as reported in Reuters:

“Nearly all of the students surveyed (98%) own a digital device. And 38% of students surveyed said that they could not go more than 10 minutes without checking in with their tech device—about the same amount of time it takes to walk to class. Largely based on the fact that technology helps students learn more efficiently, 85% of students reported that technology saves them time when studying—an average of two hours per day” (CourseSmart, 2011).

A 2012 College Explorer study showed that college students spent more than 14 hours a day using media devices such as smart phones, laptops, and tablets (Global News, 2012). The study, by a major marketing firm, reported that tech time increased four hours from 2011 to 2012, with one hour of that increase attributed to use of apps (Global News, 2012).

While some educators and families may look at the smart phone obsession of college students as a hindrance to their academic and professional development, they fail to realize that smart phones have become indispensable for college students and could provide educational benefits. In a U.S. News report, a California State University professor was quoted as saying that allowing his students to use smart phones in class became a distraction (Lytle, 2012). The professor recognized that possible advantages to using the technology but suggested that it would be a challenge to effectively integrate its use into the classroom. Smart phones are convenient, and they make life so much easier. Therefore, why don't we take advantage of this useful technology and help our students to learn to use it for more than social or entertainment purposes and show students that these devices will better assist them in learning?

Smart Phone Learning in Higher Education

Higher education has been embracing on-line learning but has been slow to exploit fully the use of smart phones for learning. Among numerous mobile devices, such as mobile phones, PDAs, laptops, Mp3 players, podcasts, GPS, satellite TV or portables DVD players, etc., mobile phones remain the most frequently used device in m-learning in higher education (Wu et al, 2012).

In their meta-analysis on trends of mobile learning studies scholars Wen-Hsiung Wu et al. (2012) summarized the research directions in recent mobile learning studies into two categories: "evaluating the effectiveness of mobile learning and designing mobile learning systems." Institutions across the globe have conducted research on m-learning by designing m-learning programs and testing the programs using students. The MUSIS (Multicasting Services and Information in Sweden) Project in Sweden utilized wireless multicast technology to develop a range of content channels for users to subscribe and download content to their phones (Milrad & Spikol, 2007). More recently, the more technologically advanced smart phones have entered the scene of m-learning. A 2008 study (as cited in Wu, 2008) conducted at Abilene Christian University in Texas pioneered in joining iPhones to mobile learning where either an Apple iPhone or iPod touch was distributed to freshmen for daily use. "With more than 15 web applications developed for use on these types of devices, students can perform tasks such as receiving homework alerts, responding to surveys and quizzes, checking meal and account balances, and creating a campus map" (Rau, Gao, & Wu, 2008). Nowadays, the ubiquity of smart phones among college students provides an efficient digital environment for m-learning and the number of smart phone applications has accrued drastically over the last few years, enabling more and more pedagogical tools.

One of the most distinctive features of smart phones is the variety of phone applications for both operating systems: Android and Apple. As of April 2013, both Android and Apple had about 800,000 phone and tablet applications (McCracken, 2013). For nearly anything you can think of, there's an application for it. With the help of wireless connection, smart phone applications allow a much quicker access to web content. The convenient, unique, and distinctive characteristics of each phone application maximize the usability of the smart phone. While iTunes Store offers some university-level audiovisual classes at the iTunes U application, few universities and colleges have taken the full advantage of phone applications for educational purposes.

Before launching our project, we conducted a survey to study students' attitude toward smart phone applications. More than 76.2% of the 63 respondents of our survey said they use their phone applications mostly for utility purposes such as to calculate, convert or translate, etc. and to keep in touch with friends (social networking) (Survey Monkey, 2013). Sixty percent (60%) said they don't use phone applications to help with their studies (Survey Monkey, 2013). Those who do use phone applications to study mostly use the calculator, flashcard creator, Google Drive or Internet browsers when they don't have a computer with them. Using a phone application to help with writing is a relatively new idea for them. While many commercial applications provide interesting writing prompts or ways of composing, students seem unlikely to link phone applications to a learning process. We attempt, when introducing a writing application to students, to teach them how they can take advantage of a familiar resource for educational purposes.

A Phone Application for Business Writing Pedagogy

To promote the usage of smart phone applications in higher education, we have designed a smart phone application to enhance the pedagogy of business writing. Writing-related phone applications are ubiquitous. A quick search at the iTunes App Store will show perhaps hundreds of writing applications that provide different writing prompts or word processing software for different genres of writing such as iWriter, Compositions, Celtx script for screenwriting or even innovative writing applications such as Tapestry, which allows the user to compose short stories in a creative way. While these tools can certainly be adapted in writing pedagogy, they are not particularly tailored for a specific writing course; therefore, these applications do not offer specific writing resources or assessments.

We, on the other hand, demonstrate with our project, that individual instructors can design smart phone applications tailored to the specific course objectives and assessment. We are also trying to meet the standards for mobile learning. According to Huang, Huang & Hsieh (2008), the studies of mobile learning have shown some similar features, which include:

1. Enhancing availability and accessibility of information networks;
2. Engaging students in learning-related activities in diverse physical locations;
3. Supporting of project-based group work;
4. Improving of communication and collaborative learning in the classroom, and;
5. Enabling quick content delivery.

Striving to achieve these features, we have designed a business rubric application as a prototype for writing resources applications. Through the experimental implementation of the prototype, we also intend to study the effectiveness of smart phone applications in higher education, particularly in writing pedagogy.

Writing Students, Especially Business Writing Students, Need Guidelines

Towson University writing courses, especially interdisciplinary writing courses, teach students specific guidelines for writing in a particular discipline. Writing, as subjective as it may be, does still require the writer to consider the rhetorical situation and the audience while composing. And we have had the hardest time making students realize how important it is to write in a certain way about a particular topic to a specified audience. Business writing, notably, has its own standards and priorities that differ

greatly from academic writing. It requires the author to put the reader at the utmost important position. In fact, certain scholars even rename business writing as “designing a reading experience for the reader” (Lillywhite, 2013).

We have found from working with Towson University business program that students who have not learned much about business writing often find it difficult to create reader –focused writing or use deductive organization structure to ensure critical information is communicated easily. The reasons for that vary. Some students believe that because the professor is the only one reading their paper, he or she is the only audience. However, even though the professor is reading the paper, he or she may not be the audience of the assignment. Others understand the concept but fail to achieve the goal because they write their papers at the last minute, leaving no time to carefully go over the assignment defining the audience before composing or editing and proofreading after composing. Their writing process is marred with insufficient knowledge or careless attitude.

Towson University CBE Addresses Business Writing Issues

To address what it found to be inadequate writing skills of its graduates, the College of Business and Economics at Towson University created a program that would build on the Advanced Writing Course in Business Writing offered by the English Department. The Business Excellence Program offers a course called Business Cornerstone class (BUSX301), which emphasizes the continuous improvement in student writing skills. Most students taking the class are juniors ready to step into advanced major-related courses. The faculty members of the Business Excellence Program have created a business writing rubric that teaches the important issues about business writing (Appendix).

The students in the BUSX301 course are given a memo-writing diagnostic assignment at the semester’s start. The course faculty uses that assignment as a teaching tool to explain to the students the business writing standards as shown in the business writing rubric. Students are taught how to write business documents following the rules in the rubric and professors would then assess students’ writing based on the rubric. At the end of the semester, the students are given a similar memo assignment to determine how much they have learned the standards and how to apply those standards to writing assignments. Despite this emphasis on writing and the writing rubric, some students fail to consider these resources when they actually sit down to write.

Students Seek Help but Fail to Use Writing Resources

Writing consultants at the Business Writing Center at Towson University, Maryland have noticed how much students failed to learn or apply business writing standards even after the course professors explained the concepts in class over and over again. The rubric, given some flexibility, serves as the guideline for business writing in the college. It is in BUSX301 where students are introduced to the rubric and taught how to use it. However, many students fail to use the rubric as I could see in their writing when they came into the Writing Lab asking me questions that I could easily answer using the rubric. When questioned why they organized their writing in a certain way, they often failed to provide a logical answer. In order to explore the student behavior, we asked students about their use of the writing rubric.

We conducted a survey and discovered that there were primarily three reasons that students didn’t use the rubric effectively. First, 50% of the 66 respondents to our survey responded that they didn’t have a copy of the rubric, and 8 students responded that they did not even know where to find one (Survey

Monkey, 2013), even though the rubric was posted on the course website and the professors would usually have a copy uploaded on the course's Blackboard website. Second, only 11.5% of the 61 respondents said they used the rubric all the time while completing their writing assignments; whereas, 23% said they used it rarely and 29.5% said they never used it. Third, they didn't know how to use it. While most students who responded to our survey said they didn't have any issues using either the hardcopy or the electronic copy of the rubric, one student mentioned that there weren't any examples on the rubric.

A Phone Application to Sell Resources to Students

The idea of creating a rubric application came to me when we were trying to come up with ideas to teach the rubric to the students. I was thinking of a way to "sell" the rubric to the students and increase its usage. From that perspective, I devised this phone application project to appeal to students since they are the most prominent smart phone users. Most students in the Cornerstone class subject to the implementation of the app have a smart phone, and they never seemed to hesitate using it before, during, and immediately after class. It's the first thing they put down on the desk when they come into the classroom. We believe that by appealing to our students as customers and using something that they are most familiar with and enjoy using the most, we can perhaps promote further interest and motivation in learning about business writing.

The Creation and Implementation of the BUSXRubric App

The start of the project involved researching about application-creating software and generating content based on the rubric, taking consideration of students' expectations. Being no expert on smart phone technology, we found numerous application-building websites that offer basic app building services. The free services these websites offer come with limitations. We chose The AppBuilder (2013) for its simplicity and easy-to-use features. It also offers unlimited download with a free package, which some other websites don't have. We then conducted the aforementioned survey testing students' view and expectations on a rubric application. To enrich the content and make the rubric more user-friendly, we included detailed explanations for each rubric point and offered corresponding examples. In an attempt to engender students' interest in using the application, we included creative narratives to further explain the rubric points.

The application currently contains six sections. They are listed in the following order:

1. Section One: The rubric in its original text.
2. Section Two: Rubric List. This section explains each rubric point in detail with examples.
3. Section Three: Rubric Scenario. This section has two stories with scenarios created to explain each rubric point.
4. Section Four: Exercises. The prototype currently connects to the link of one quiz created on a quiz website.
5. Section Five: Help. This section gives contact information to the Business Writing Lab on campus. Students can call or email to schedule an appointment directly from the application.
6. Section Six: Questions. This section allows students to submit questions directly to the creator of the application, which would be the instructor.

After launching the prototype in two sections of the Business Cornerstone class at Towson University, we conducted another survey that yielded 30 respondents. Over 80% of the respondents said they

found the application helpful and that the explanations of the rubric helped with their study. Over 70% said they found the scenarios helped with their study (Survey Monkey, 2013). However, we do acknowledge the limitations of our results and are continuing to promote the app to new students.

Distinctive Features of the Application Provide Pedagogical Advantages

Using a phone application to present business writing resources could be successful due to its potential for media richness. With interactions with a teacher being considered the most media rich, the phone application may include some aspect of other types of media rich communication. Pei-Luen, Gao, and Ding (2008) quoting Daft and Lengel (2008), writing that media richness means: “the ability of information to change and understanding within a time interval or provide substantial new consensual understanding.” Pei-Luen writes that Daft and Lengel outline media richness as having four components: “the ability of the medium to transmit multiple cues, immediacy of feedback, language variety, and the personal focus of the medium.” Daft and Lengel (as cited in Pei Luen, 2008) ranked face-to-face as the most media rich, followed by video, telephone, computer mediated communications, addressed written communication, and unaddressed written communication, with formal numeric text as last. A smart phone application allows students to obtain knowledge at their personal convenience while maintaining an active communication with the instructor.

The development of modern technology and the Internet’s ubiquity has made students more accustomed to fast reading. In her book *Letting Go of the Words: Writing Web Content that Works*, Janice Redish (2012) writes that people skim and scan when reading web content. In a 2009 *New York Times* article, Ed Stanford, president of McGraw-Hill Higher Education, said students may not use smart phone apps to read textbooks because of the small size of the screens. “He sees untapped opportunities to use computers, including the iPhone, to give students individualized help when reviewing. A practice quiz that runs on the phone could point students who select an incorrect answer to the related passage in the textbook — and to nothing more” (Stross, 2009). But phone apps do not need to supply readers with text-dense information. Our prototype demonstrates that text on apps is simple and succinct and the content is interesting and accompanied with images to attract students’ attention thus motivating them to learn.

The simplicity and user-friendliness of the application would be easy for students to use. When writing an assignment, because almost all submissions are electronic now, students would write on a school computer or their own laptop. When students used to complain that they didn’t have a copy of the rubric, with this application, they would have it readily at their disposal. For those who did look up the rubric occasionally for guidance, the application is better organized than the hardcopy, so it would be easier for the students to find the information they are looking for. For those who used an electronic copy, instead of having to open it in another window on the screen, they can simply look up the rubric on their phone, therefore keeping only one window on the screen, the one that they are writing on, to avoid diversion of the eye and helping them stay focused on the writing.

A hardcopy rubric or an electronic version is usually long and doesn’t contain examples. By highlighting the rubric points, the application engages students in the reflection of their writing process and writing assessment. Because each rubric point is explained with an example in a separate section, the students have a chance to study and examine each rubric point separately so as to have a better understanding of the idea and have more time to reflect upon how they should reach the required goal. This way, the application pushes them to think further about their writing process. After composing, they can use the application as a checklist to see if they have done everything right.

In the prototype we designed, we also included some narratives that simulate business scenarios. "In general a 'scenario' presents information using characters performing activities in a specialized setting" (Crumbley, 2000), Crumbley (2000) writes that other studies have shown that that scenarios aid in student developing communication skills and creativity. These stories are examples of how we, as educators, can attempt to engage students in critical thinking by the method of analogy (Crumbley, 2010). These scenarios link class material to real life events outside of the ivory tower and offer a more realistic perspective for the students. Interests boost motivation. If we could try to increase their motivation, we might yield better outcome.

The application should use simple language. Adhering to the concept of "Readers are Raiders for information" by Johnson-Sheehan, the layout and structure of the application should take into consideration phone application users' expectations and the usability feature of phone applications (Johnson-Sheehan, n.d.). Phone application content design follows similar etiquette like web content design where the text should be presented in short and concise blocks with graphics to enable readers to quickly get information they are looking for (Redish, 2012). The compact information provided on the application, where texts are blocked and grouped with images, facilitates students' learning process. Easy navigation requires that students navigate through different sections on the screen, each section providing something new to keep them interested.

Conclusion

In their study, El-Hussein and Cronje (2010) have defined the concepts of m-learning into three significant areas: "mobility of technology, mobility of learner and mobility of learning." Our prototype encompasses all three of them. Smart phones and Wi-Fi networks assure the mobility of technology. Unbound by location or time, students can learn the writing material at anytime, anywhere they want, and in a manner they choose. The rich content of the application also enhances the mobility of learning.

This prototype, while simple, opens a new window in technology-enhanced writing pedagogy. Many m-learning studies, such as Heath B, et al., (2005) have shown a strong inclination on creating a virtual learning platform for distance learners as opposed to traditional learning communities. However, this project proposes using mobile phones as a tool for both inside and outside classrooms by taking advantage of smart phone applications to offer students readily available writing resources. Just like certain commercial phone applications that provide writing prompts for various genres, we propose creating phone applications tailored to specific writing courses and programs. In their article, "An Experiment for Improving Students Performance in Secondary and Tertiary Education by Means of M-Learning Auto-assessment," Scholar Luis De-Marcos discovered a recurrent theme in different studies by scholars on m-learning (Chen, 2010; Huang, Huang, & Hsieh, 2008; O'Malley, 2003; Motiwalla, 2007; Vavoula, Lefrere, O'Malley, Sharples, & Taylor, 2004): "mobile/electronic education should not attempt to replace traditional education, but should instead support both students and teachers by providing them with services that facilitate teaching, learning and/or any related administrative tasks" (De-Marco, 2010). This project not only supports such a theme in higher education but also demonstrates how traditional material can be presented and interpreted more efficiently with modern technology.

While claiming that mobile learning would be conducive to ameliorating students' performance, we do not support the idea of completely replacing conventional classroom teaching with mobile learning. In his article "M is for maybe," Clive Shepherd proposes to use m-learning as an aid in the preparatory phase, before any learning actually takes place, through the use of "diagnosis" and to employ m-learning

approaches as a means of supporting students when they are preparing for their examinations, reviewing content and reinforcing the knowledge they have acquired to date (Shepherd, 2001). Our BUSXRubric application serves exactly that purpose if not more.

However, the prototype is only a primitive example. Different writing courses may require different ways to set up the materials and may not include assessment such as a rubric. It can be a spectrum of writing examples of different levels or various links and brief descriptions to research topics or sources. Instructors can even engage students in a discussion where they come up with an idea together as to what needs to be improved in students' writing and how a phone application would help them improve. Certain features may demand more complicated technological and instructional design in which case a professional application designer maybe required. Nevertheless, one of the advantages of a simple application is its low cost. Many of the writing applications in app stores are not free; by creating their own application using free software packages, the instructor can offer the application to their students for free. If available, the instructor may be able to acquire larger support from their institution in order to produce a more complicated application at a reasonable cost.

Despite its effectiveness, mobile learning has also posed some problems, as stated in El-Hussein and Cronje's (2010) study: "What new design paradigms and meanings can be attributed to the use of mobile technology? How can we appreciate their full significance within the context of traditional instructional design?"

While yielding positive outcomes, the implementation of our prototype leaves much room to improve. As we revise our rubric, we are also constantly thinking about how to improve the content and design of the application by creating new scenarios or experimenting with different app design software. We are also continuing to promote our app to future business writing students who will provide us with constructive feedback on the usability of the app.

References

AppBuilder. (2013). The App Builder, JamPot: Create and Do. Retrieved from the Appbuilder.com.

Chen, C. H. (2010). The implementation and evaluation of a mobile self- and peer-assessment system. *Computers & Education*, 55, 229-236.

CourseSmart. (2011). Digital dependence of today's college students revealed in new study from coursesmart™. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/06/01/idUS141122> 01-Jun-2011 PRN20110601

Crumbly, L.D. & Smith, M.L. (2000). Using short stories to teach critical thinking and communication skills to tax students. *Accounting Education*, 9(3)

De-Marco, L. (2010). An experiment for improving students' performance in secondary and tertiary education by means of m-learning auto-assessment. *Computers & Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360131510001259>.

El-Hussein, M. O. M. & Cronje, C.J. (2010). Defining Mobile Learning in the Higher Education Landscape. *Educational Technology & Society*, 13(3), 12-21.

- Federickson, C. (2013). College Students Adopt Mobile across the Board. Retrieved from <http://www.emarketer.com/newsroom/index.php/college-students-adopt-mobile-board>.
- Global News Wire. (2012). College Students Arrive Confident, Smart-er and With Climbing Consumer Spending Power. Retrieved from <http://globenewswire.com/news-release/2012/09/12/490387/10004857/en/Campus-Life-Back-in-Session-College-Students-Arrive-Confident-Smart-er-and-With-Climbing-Consumer-Spending-Power.html>
- Heath, B., Herman, R., Lugo, G., Reeves, J., Vetter, R., & Ward, C. (2005). Develop a Mobile Learning Environment to Support Virtual Education Communities. *Technological Horizons in Education*, 32(8), 33-37.
- Huang, Y.-M., Huang, T.-C., & Hsieh, M.-Y. (2008). Using Annotation Services in a Ubiquitous Jigsaw Cooperative Learning. *Educational Technology & Society*, 11 (2), 3-15.
- Johnson-Sheehan, R. (n.d.). Planning and Organizing Proposals and Technical Reports. Retrieved from http://owl.english.purdue.edu/media/pdf/20080628094326_727.pdf
- Lillywhite, H. (2004). *High Impact Business Writing*. Houghton Mifflin College Division.
- Lytle, R. (2012). Smartphone Use Among College Students Concerns Some Professors. Retrieved from <http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2012/03/21/smartphone-use-among-college-students-concerns-some-professors>.
- McCracken, H. (2013). Who's Winning, iOS or Android? All the Numbers, All in One Place. Retrieved from <http://techland.time.com/2013/04/16/ios-vs-android/>.
- Milrad, M. & Spikol, D. (2007). Anytime, Anywhere Learning Supported by Smart Phones: Experiences and Results from the MUSIS Project. *Educational Technology & Society*, 10(4), 62-70. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/06/business/06digi.html?_r=0
- Motiwalla, L. F. (2007). Mobile learning: a framework and evaluation. *Computers & Education*, 49, 581-596.
- O'Malley, C. (2003). Guidelines for leaning in a mobile environment. Retrieved from <http://www.mobilelearn.org/download/results/guidelines.pdf>.
- Pei-Luen, P. R., Gao, Q., & Ding, Y. (2008). Relationship between the level of intimacy and lurking in online social network services. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 24(6), 2757-2770.
- Rau, P. P., Gao, Q., & Wu, L. (2008). Using mobile communication technology in high school education: Motivation, pressure, and learning performance. *Computers & Education*, 50(1), 1–22. Retrieved from www.elsevier.com/locate/compedu.
- Redish, J. (2012). *Letting Go of Words: Writing Web Content that Works* (2nd ed.). Morgan Kauffman Publishers, Imprint of Elsevier.

Shepherd, C. (2007). MLearning (Mobile Learning) - "M" is for Maybe". Retrieved from [http://www.cedma-europe.org/newsletter%20articles/misc/MLearning%20\(Mobile%20Learning\)%20-%20M%20is%20for%20Maybe%20\(Apr%2007\).pdf](http://www.cedma-europe.org/newsletter%20articles/misc/MLearning%20(Mobile%20Learning)%20-%20M%20is%20for%20Maybe%20(Apr%2007).pdf)

Smartphone Users Around the World – Statistics and Facts [Infographic]. (January 2, 2012). *Go-Gulf*. Retrieved from <http://www.go-gulf.com/blog/smartphone/>.

Stross, R. (2008, September 5). Texting? No, Just Trying to Read Chapter 6. *The New York Times*.

Vavoula, G. N., Lefrere, P., O'malley, C., Sharples, M., & Taylor, J. (2004). Producing guidelines for learning, teaching and tutoring in a mobile environment. In *Proceedings of the 2nd IEEE international workshop on wireless and mobile technologies in education (WMTE'04)*. Bristol (UK).

Wu, W., Wu, Y. J., Chen, C., Kao, H., Lin, C., & Huang, S. (2012). Reviews of trends from mobile learning studies: A meta-analysis. *Computers and Education*. Retrieved from Elsevier.

CHEN CHEN has recently obtained her diploma of Master of Science in Professional Writing from Towson University, Maryland where she has developed a passion for teaching college composition. This fall, she is teaching an advanced business writing course at her alma mater and a freshman composition course at Community College of Baltimore County, Maryland.

QUINCEY R. JOHNSON, ESQ. is a Senior Lecturer and Director of Professional and Legal Studies in the College of Business and Economics at Towson University, Maryland. He holds a law degree from University of Maryland School of Law and a master's degree from St. Johns College in Annapolis, MD.

Appendix. Towson University Business Writing Rubric

Business Writing Rubric

Message - Drafting Phase

Criteria

Weight

Score

Answers all assignment-specific questions.

All questions posed by the assignment are answered with a high level of quality and completeness.

Provides sufficient, documented support for all relevant statements.

All claims made in the document are supported with relevant and credible sources of evidence, and all facts and information that are not common knowledge is properly cited in the proper format (APA)

Targets message to audience; acknowledges and meets audience needs (explicitly, if possible).

Writer identifies appropriate primary audience and secondary audiences and ensures that the primary audience needs are addressed directly, given context, and provided with answers to key questions,

both explicit and implicit, where appropriate.

Gives an introduction that could stand alone and gives a clear bottom line for the document.

The introduction to the document should be a mini executive summary, which includes a purpose statement and summary of the document's main points or claims are present and well disposed; bottom line is specific and distills the main idea of the document.

Organization - Editing Phase I

Criteria

Weight

Score

Structures each paragraph deductively with a topic sentence that gives a bottom line for the paragraph.

All paragraphs have leading topic sentences that are specific enough to foreshadow the logical content and support that follows. The topic sentence makes a claim and provides a reason for the claim and should be supported by evidence. Paragraph should deal with one main idea.

Transitions between sentences and paragraphs cohesively.

Writer should make explicit transitions between paragraphs and sentences that contribute to the logical flow of the document.

Design - Editing Phase II

Criteria

Weight

Score

Formatting and design should help the reader read the document more easily.

Writer should use appropriate margins and line spacing; consistent font size and type; headings that are formatted consistently; white space to enhance readability; bulleted or numbered list used when needed.

Writes headings that can stand alone as "headlines," and gives the bottom line for the text that follows.

Writers should use headings that read like headlines and give a bottom line. Document conclusions can be gathered by reading the headlines alone. While they headlines would provide the same basic information as the topic sentence, they should be different with the topic sentence providing both a claim and reason for that claim.

Provides readable, usable graphs, charts, and tables that are referenced specifically in the text and convey information effectively.

Writer should use charts for all pieces of information that require them. Writer should use the appropriate chart for the information being provided: (1) line or bar graphic to show trends, (2) tables to show comparison of two items, or (3) pie charts to show portions of a whole. Charts are referenced and analyzed in text of document.

Style - Proofreading Phase

Criteria

Weight

Score

Chooses words appropriately for the audience; writes in "plain English" and avoids lofty diction.

Writer composes in "plain English" and words are clear and precise and give a particular meaning where appropriate. Writer avoids jargon, idioms, clichés, and euphemisms.

Free from LOCs errors.

Deduct 2% per LOC detected to a maximum of 10% for the paper.
Allow remediation of LOCs by a visit to writing support or a detailed remediation paper submitted to instructors.
