Collaborative Project and Presentation Assignment Sheet

A major assignment in English 435/535 is the production of a collaborative project on a current and significant topic. We will begin this assignment with in-class and out-of-class exercises that help each group find a problem, need, or opportunity that can be reasonably addressed given available time and resources.

Phase One: Find a problem/need/opportunity and examine its staying power. Your problem statement should name the problem you will address, the organization you will represent, and the decision-making readers you will attempt to persuade.
Resources: Class exercises; trends in your discipline; issues in the workplace
Questions to consider: Can this problem be addressed productively by a written report? Is the problem complex enough to challenge and interest you? Does the problem interest other people too? Does the problem relate to your background and make use of your capabilities? Is the problem worth solving?
Problem statement due on February 5

Phase Two: Write a proposal seeking permission to go ahead with the project. Your goal for the proposal should be to convince me that your group has selected an important and timely problem and is prepared to study that problem. A second goal is to convince yourselves of the same thing by the very act of writing the proposal. In other words, the work you do on the proposal will be work that will move the group ahead on the project itself.
Resources: Ch. 12: "Proposals and Business Plans" and "Proposal Evaluation" handout.
Proposal Draft due Feb. 26
Oral Proposal Presentation due Mar. 5
Final Proposal due Mar. 19

Phase Three: Research and develop your project document.
Based on your work on the proposal and your discussions with me, implement your project plan. During this phase you will write periodic memos to me and give oral reports to class colleagues reporting your progress.
Resources: Chapters 10, 11, and 13
Partial Draft and Progress Report due Mar. 16
Draft of project due April 2

Phase Four: Give a 20-25 minute oral presentation on your project.
Resources: Ch. 14: "Presenting Reports Orally" and "Oral Presentation Eval" handout
Presentation scheduled for April 16 or 23

Phase Five: Revise your project by incorporating responses to your presentation; then submit a folder containing two copies of your final project and one copy of all written work leading up to it.
Resources: Chapters 10 and 13 plus the "Report Evaluation" handout.
Final, revised project due <u>April 23</u>.

Teaching Notes for Choosing Research Topics

These teaching notes were developed by adapting suggestions from the instructor's manual for <u>The Writing of Business</u> by Robert Inkster and Judith Kilborn (1999).

Round 1: Show lists of possible topics (a compilation of topics from lists students submitted the previous week). Discuss how some topics relate to management and writing. Have students write answers to the following questions about one topic from the list:

1. Within the broad problem area, carve out three specific problems you might address. Identify the features of these 3 problems--make the problem visible in words.
2. Continue to describe each problem. Identify specific behaviors, policies, practices, activities, or technical characteristics that seem significant.
3. Evaluate each problem or issue in terms of its potential to be addressed productively by a written proposal and report.

Round 2: Have several students read their answers from Round 1 aloud and discuss them. Pose the next set of questions:

1. Select one of the three problems. Is this problem complex enough to challenge and interest you?
2. Does the problem interest other people too, especially those registered for a management writing course?
3. Does the problem relate to YOUR background and make use of YOUR capabilities?
4. Can the problem be addressed productively in the allotted time?
5. Is the problem worth solving? (So What?)

Round 3: Last questions:
1. Select the best problem for you at this time. List the decision-making readers and others affected by the problem. Decide on the organization you will represent (which company or agency will you be working for) as you explore this problem.
2. Write a few sentences convincing me to let you proceed with your project.

Document Cycling Workshop

The following process is adapted from one used at the U.S. General Accounting Office for training purposes. The overall goal is to increase the document's effectiveness and readability by having reviewers look at higher-order concerns in draft documents.

Directions for the writer(s)

Pass out copies of the document and introduce it to the review group by stating what stage of drafting the document is in (first draft? fifth draft?). Name your primary audience. State the purpose of the document. State the action you want the primary audience to take as a result of the document. Then give the reviewers time to read your document. While they are reading, you will also read your document. Each member of your group should respond to one set of review questions.

Directions for reviewers

Reviewer #1 will prepare responses to the questions about Message and Content.
Reviewer #2 will prepare responses to the questions about Structure and Organization.
Reviewer #3 will focus on Paragraphing.
Reviewer #4 will consider the Overall Effect of the document.

After time for reading and review, the reviewers give their comments to the writer who should listen and take notes, but should not engage in debate with the reviewers. After all reviewers have spoken, the writer may ask questions.

Questions for Reviewer #1: Message and Content

Massive amounts of information are gathered for most reports. However, merely reporting the information is insufficient. Writers need to communicate their understanding of the facts by forming clear, specific message statements, and by selecting information that supports these statements. Facts do not speak for themselves.
1. Is the message clearly stated? Where?
2. Are there vague terms or phrases that could force a reader to guess their meanings?
3. Is the message adequately supported? Is each major support developed with details, examples, or illustrations?
4. Does the report answer all the reader's questions? Does it counter probable objections?
5. Does the report contain details or examples that are not directly related to its message?

Questions for Reviewer #2: Structure and Organization

1. How is information organized in the report? (deductive, inductive, other)
2. Does the report include an overview paragraph, introduction, or executive summary that establishes a framework?
3. Can a reader easily find information? Does the report contain organizers such as headings and subheadings that give a clear sense of the message? Can you suggest some headings?
4. Is the reader given an easy-to-follow pathway from the beginning of the report to the end? Can you understand why the report was structured in a particular way? Can the sections be re-ordered more effectively?

Questions for Reviewer #3: Paragraphing

1. Could a busy reader skim the report by reading the first sentence of each paragraph and get an overall idea of the report's development?
2. Choose any three paragraphs from the report that could benefit from a close reading and answer the following questions about each of those paragraphs.
   a. Is each paragraph about one main idea?
   b. Does the topic sentence prepare the reader for what the paragraph will say?
   c. Does every sentence in the paragraph support or develop the paragraph's controlling idea? Does any sentence seem irrelevant?
   d. How does the writer link details within the paragraph so the reader can see the relationship between details? (transition words, repetition of key terms, parallel structure, etc.)

Questions for Reviewer #4: Overall Effect

1. How would you describe the document's tone? What words or phrases establish this tone?
2. Did you understand the document on the first reading?
3. What could be done to make the document more reader based?
4. Would any information be better expressed in a visual or graphic form?
5. What do you think is the most interesting aspect of the document?

Data Analysis: Fire in the Lumber Mill

The following notes were taken by the fire marshal when investigating the site of a lumber mill fire. Choose a writing situation that might result from the fire (for example: the marshal's report, a notice to employees of the mill, a press release, an insurance report). Write out a GRACE analysis of the writing situation you have picked, and then classify and organize the data in a way that is logical for that situation. As time allows, begin to draft the document.

1. Fire buildings contained flammable liquids.
2. 6:00 a.m.B fire first noted in woodpile.
3. 1:20 p.m. B fire department called.
4. Fire aided by 40 mile-per-hour winds.
5. Spontaneous ignition of combustible by-products which spread to panel building which was the second building to catch fire.
6. First fire building used as electrical shop and storage area for lumber.
7. 7:00 a.m. B plant supervisor arrived and wet smoldering area.
8. Fire buildings contained sprinkler system.
9. 1:20 p.m. B fire resumed in same area of wood pile and spread to second area..
10. 1:30 p.m. B sprinkler system activated in panel building.
11. Wood, bark, sawdust stored in three piles about 100 feet south of first building and 150 feet west of second building.
12. Second fire building is called the panel plant or panel building.
13. 50 gallon drums of flammable liquid stored in panel plant.
14. $350,000 loss.
15. Panel building destroyed. Three woodpiles ruined.

Self-Assessment of Project Draft

Adapted from Hager and Scheiber (1992), <u>Report Writing for Management</u> <u>Decisions</u>, p. 110.

1. Name the primary reader(s) or organizational audience(s) for your project.
2. How well does the draft of the project meet the needs of these readers?
3. What else might you do to better meet their needs?
4. Who else might read your project? How well does the draft meet the needs of these readers? What else might you do to better meet their needs?
5. Review the working outline or table of contents for your draft. Have you named each section in a way that clearly identifies the material in it? Check the order of the sections. How might you rearrange the sections to make the information more accessible to readers?
6. Check the data and information in each section of the draft. Where might you add or delete data to strengthen the message of the report?
7. At this point what do you like best about the draft?
8. What weaknesses do you see? What might you do about them in the next draft?