Business Students Writing on the Job

DO 100WB GRADUATES HAVE THE NECESSARY WRITING SKILLS FOR TODAY’S WORKPLACE?
Research Methodology

On-line Survey
- SJSU College of Business (CoB) graduates (CY 2013-2015)
- Quantitative
- Total Responses = 108

In-person Interviews
- CoB faculty recommended by Dean
- Qualitative
- Total = 4

Conducted in March-May, 2017
Survey Purpose

To assess whether CoB graduates felt they had the necessary writing skills to fulfill their current job requirements and to provide direction on how 100WB curriculum could be improved.
Faculty Interview Purpose

To gather anecdotal evaluations on the writing preparedness of CoB students for upper division business courses.
Survey Result Confidence

We can be 95% confident (level of certainty) that the whole population’s response is between +/- 10 pts (margin of error) of the survey result.

E.g. If we surveyed 100% of the 3,627 CoB graduates who received this survey, their actual answer would be within a +/- 10 pt. range of the survey result.
Findings

Results of Survey
The Good News

Evaluation of How Well Personal Writing Skills Meet Current Job Requirements
(108 Responses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not meet at all</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet occasionally</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet 50% of the time</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet most of the time</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet all of the time</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

100% = 1% 8% 44% 47%
Email: Most Frequently Used Medium

Frequency of Business Communication, By Type
(108 Responses)

- More Than Once/Month
- Several Times/Year
- Less Than Once/Year
- Never

# of Responses

- Email
- Text
- Instant Msg.
- Printed Material
- Company Communications App. (Yammer, Slack)
- Company Social Media Site
Top Purpose for Writing: Routine Requests

Frequency of Business Communication, By Purpose
(107 Responses)

- More Than Once/Month
- Several Times/Year
- Less Than Once/Year
- Never

# of Responses

- To persuade someone to do something
- To inform (e.g. to update others on a work effort or company concern)
- To make a routine request (e.g. to obtain status of a project or a copy of report)
- To give negative news (e.g. from not fulfilling a routine request to giving a negative performance review)
- To delegate tasks (e.g. to an individual or work team)
- To coordinate work (e.g. among others either inside or outside the company)
- To make an announcement
- To express an opinion
- To acknowledge personal events (e.g. promotion, leaving company, thank you)
Most Frequent Type: Short, Informal Reports

Frequency of Business Communication, By Type of Document
(107 Responses)

- Longer, formal report (e.g., a competitive analysis for upper management)
- Short, informal report (e.g., trip report, project update)
- A report with findings, conclusions, and recommendations
- PowerPoint presentation
- Business plan
- Marketing plan
- Proposal

Responses:
- More Than Once/Month
- Several Times/Year
- Less Than Once/Year
- Never
Frequency of Collaborative Writing: Low

Frequency of Collaborative Writing
(108 Responses)

- Often: 37%
- Seldom: 46%
- Never: 17%
Keys to Success: The Big 5

Importance of Writing Skills to Work Success
(108 responses)

- #1: Clarity of ideas
- #2: Organization of ideas
- #3: Understanding audience needs
- #4: Accurate spelling/grammar
- #5: Conciseness of wording

# of responses:
- Not Important
- Important
- Very Important
- Don't Know
Writing Skills: Feel Confident Using

Student Is Confident Using These Skills
(102 responses)

- Conciseness of wording: 44 mentions
- Clarity of ideas: 47 mentions
- Creating PowerPoint slides: 43 mentions
- Accurate Spelling/Grammar: 42 mentions
- Organization of ideas: 47 mentions
- Understanding audience needs: 51 mentions
- Writing to a multicultural audience: 29 mentions
- Writing for executives: 34 mentions
- Writing for a technical audience: 31 mentions
Writing Skills: Improvement Desired

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills Student Would Like To Acquire or Become More Comfortable Using</th>
<th># of Mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conciseness of wording</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity of ideas</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating PowerPoint slides</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accurate spelling/grammar</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of ideas</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding audience needs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing to a multicultural audience</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing for executives</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing for a technical audience</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on your experience, what suggestions do you have to help us improve writing instruction for undergraduate business majors?

(86 responses)
More Emphasis on These Skills

1-2 mentions: Writing for Execs, Tech/Product related, Persuasion, PowerPoint
Medium to emphasize: Email
Most Mentioned Types: Reports and Proposals
More Real World Scenarios

**PROCESS**

- Group/Collaborative Work: 2 mentions
- Analysis/Critical Thinking: 5 mentions

**CONTENT**

- "Real World": 11 mentions
- Email Etiquette: 5 mentions
Faculty Selection and Participation

Selection:
• Recommended by Acting Dean Malu Roldan (4 CoB faculty)
• Valued good writing

Participation:
• Input on student survey questions
• 45 minute interviews
Faculty Interview: Summary

Faculty mentioned “The Big 5”, but with different emphasis.

- Organization
- Audience  More Often Mentioned
- Grammar
- Clarity  Less Often Mentioned
- Conciseness
Faculty Comments: Organization

• No organization of ideas---need outlining skills.
• “Too stream of consciousness.” Need to practice outlines.
• Claims need substantiation with details. “Every sentence or next one should have data”.
• Stronger support of arguments.
Faculty Comments: Audience

• Lack of knowledge of expected formality: $5,000 scholarship nomination mistake.

• Learn to say “no” to your boss.

• Lack ability to think about audience well. “Think of someone reading this that isn’t in the class”.

• Practice the same message with inward and outward-facing audiences.
Faculty Comments: Grammar

• Spell checker not used---fragments.
• One ex-CEO rejected reports that had a lot of grammar mistakes.
• Need to avoid hyperbole (e.g. “astonishing results”)
• Overuse of commas
• Proofreading/editing skills are badly needed
• Errors seen: Commonly confused words; subj-verb agreement; jargon; using wrong pronoun, esp. not knowing that “company” is “it”.
• Grammar is an issue for the minority (10%).
Faculty Comments: Clarity

Clarity of purpose of writing is very important.

Explaining complex ideas clearly is needed.
Faculty Comment: Conciseness

“Stressing word count can be a negative. Stress covering the subject instead.”
Conclusions
Conclusions

1.) Room for improvement to have skills to meet job requirements.
   - 44% “most of the time”
   - 9% “half the time or less”

2.) Important skills for success: Conciseness, Clarity, Organization, Audience, Grammar.

3.) Most common purpose = Routine Tasks (e.g. requesting, coordinating, delegating, informing)

4.) Email, texting, IMs---most frequently used.
5.) Want “real world” business scenarios.

6.) Short more common than long.

7.) Semi-formal more common than formal.

8.) PowerPoint used frequently & competently.

9.) New skills desired: writing for execs and technical audiences
Implications
Ideas to Consider for 100WB Curriculum
Implications

1.) Integration of “Top 5” into all assignments (Organization, Audience, Clarity, Conciseness, and Grammar).
   - Impact on lesson plan sequence, assignments, evaluation?

2.) Fewer long reports, more shorter assignments.
   - How to achieve 8,000 goal?
   - Impact on workload (students and instructor)?

3.) Need to develop a resource of “real world” scenarios as assignment prompts (e.g. case studies, current news, textbook examples)
   - Collaborative effort?

4.) Re-evaluation of purposes of assignments
   - E.g. Are ”giving negative news” and oral presentations needed?
Discussion?