LC English Links

English Links are often a success component of a Learning Community. This document provides an overview of the benefits of incorporating an English link into your Learning Community, descriptions of the various English courses your LC can link to, the process to starting and maintaining English links, and examples of best practices.

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Introduction

Students benefit from an integrated curriculum and research shows that students "persist in their studies if the learning they experience is meaningful, deeply engaging, and relevant to their lives" (Lardner and Malnarich 32). The acquisition of communication skills, then, is enhanced when students understand its importance in their major field and see how the skills they are learning in foundation communication courses are applicable to their majors and future employment. Such connections are more easily made when the ISUComm instructor collaborates with students' discipline faculty. The development of effective communication skills is enhanced when students learn from "the teacher who is already grounded in the content of the field and who is fluent in the disciplinary discourse—the history teacher, the biology teacher, the math teacher" (McLeod 154).

An integrated curriculum that provides such links is readily developed within learning communities, especially through faculty collaboration and links across disciplines. A recent National Study of Student Engagement (NSSE) report suggests that the most effective learning community component positively influencing desired outcomes is integration across disciplines, "Students in LC programs that integrated material across courses—either by discussion groups or class assignments—had higher scores on all five NSSE benchmarks" (15).

A purposeful interdisciplinary approach to communication, where interdisciplinary work is a method of cognitive development, provides students with more opportunities for success. An interdisciplinary approach allows students to not only learn the principles of effective communication, but to practice those principles *in their major area*. In such a course, communication is no longer the domain of a required class whose contents can more easily be dismissed with submission of the final paper, but the building blocks for more advanced communication assignments in the upper-level courses. An interdisciplinary approach to the English link shows students that communication is a required component of their own field and requires them to integrate the discipline of communication into their major area. Students benefit when their foundation courses are no longer distinct and separate from their perceived "real classes," but are interwoven with them.

Components of successful English links

Communication

English instructors are experts in the process of communication and communication pedagogy, but they are likely not experts in communication as it is developed and delivered in your discipline. As you collaborate with English that first semester to develop an English link, and during subsequent semester to refine and sustain the link, please be in continuous communication with the English instructor:

- **Learn about each other's expectations and disciplines**. Begin preliminary meeting between the LC Coordinator, English partner, and interested faculty member to introduce themselves and to begin a discussion of how to proceed developing the course.

- **Help instructor adapt the course**. Meet with the instructor discuss potential topics, assignments, and readings that your students and faculty would find helpful.

- **Assess**. Communicate during the middle and end of the semester to review the strengths and weaknesses of the current curriculum and to begin discussions for revising for the next time.

Coordination

An English link is a link between your department, its learning community, and communication instruction. Work with your English instructor to develop a linked assignment or discussion. Develop clear connections between communication and your discipline.

Starting and sustaining effective links

Learn and share

English instructors enjoy helping students learn to become more effective communicators, and to do that, instructors need to learn more about your students, your expectations, and how communication is done in your discipline.

> Share information about your **students** if you have it. What are their typical career aspirations? Backgrounds? Motivations? Etc. Anything that can help the instructor finds materials to appeal to their interests and/or connect course content to their motivations.

> What are your **goals and expectations** for the link and for your students? What would you like them to be able to do? What types of communication will they need to do in their careers? What would you like to contribute to the course?

> Learn about each other's discipline. The English partner with whom you'll be working will have an interest in your field, but may not be fully aware of all that the field encompasses. How would you **explain your field** (biology, industrial engineering, design, etc.) to someone unfamiliar with it? How do students prepare for their careers—what kinds of courses will they take? Internships? What would you like to know about **English and communication pedagogy**?

English instructors are quite concerned about effectively and ethically incorporating a new subject area into their own courses. They thoroughly enjoy increasing student interest in communication by showing students how effective communication skills will be of value in their majors, but instructors are also concerned about accurately representing content which lies outside their area of expertise.

Provide assistance

You and your fellow faculty are the major-area experts, and your knowledge is invaluable to your English instructor. What kinds of assistance could you and your fellow faculty provide to your English partner? Some general examples are:

- Brainstorm topics for readings and projects from your field,
- Help find quality, interesting texts for students to read,
- Guest lecture,
- Read and review content of student work,
- Organize activities such as field trips or poster sessions.

English course content

Although English instructors are by and large happy to collaborate with you and your Department in order to develop a linked English course to benefit your students, English courses have specific

content material that must be included. However, the content can be put into the context of your major area and can be adapted to more closely reflect the specific requirements expected in your students' major area.

English 150

Overview
The purpose of English 150 is to prepare students for communicating successfully in their academic courses, as well as in their work, personal, and civic lives. Because of what the National Council of Teachers of English calls the importance of 21st-century literacies, most of the course will be devoted to writing, but students will also practice and analyze oral, visual, and electronic communication. Students will also compile and reflect on a portfolio of their work.

Learning Objectives
At the end of English 150, students should be able to:

Written
- Adapt your writing to specific purposes, audiences, and situational contexts
- Integrate and document a range of informational sources, from personal interviews to print and electronic publications
- Practice varied organizational strategies and transitional devices
- Match expression to situation and audience, avoiding errors that distract or confuse
- Design effective presentation forms by attending to spacing, margins, headings, color, and typography
- Develop strategies to revise your own writing
- Reflect upon your communication processes, strengths, goals, and growth

Oral
- Ask effective questions and listening actively
- Function as an effective team member in small groups as contributor, listener, collaborator, and presenter
- Develop basic oral presentation skills, focusing on meaningful information, clear organization, and engaging delivery

Visual
- Use typography effectively, particularly in creating headings and subheadings
- Create an appropriate layout format for a bookmark, brochure, fact sheet, or newsletter
- Analyze visual communication, such as art on campus
- Use visuals effectively (e.g., imported, scanned, or digital pictures) and integrate them with written texts
- Accurately document visual sources

Electronic
- Use appropriate format, voice, and language in a professional email (e.g., correspondence with an instructor)
- Use word processing skills, including making headings, attachments, tables, etc.
- Create an electronic composition (e.g., poster, communication eportfolio)
- Choose one or more suitable media for delivering a communication to its intended audience

Assignments

The projects students work in during the course include the following:

- **Sharing experiences**—Focusing on one event or a related series of events in students' academic, civic, or personal parts of their life, students will consider their audience and what they are trying to accomplish: Why would you want to share this experience with an audience? What might others gain from it? What do you gain from it? How can you shape the communication so that your intentions are met with this audience? How might visuals or an oral component enhance the sharing of your experience?

- **Exploring and providing information**—This project gives students the chance to examine what they know about an idea or subject from various perspectives, to explore new information, and then present that information clearly and efficiently to an audience. Such a project is used to help students clarify their thinking on a topic of importance to them by allowing them to gain insight on the overall picture; it is also designed to help their audience reach a clearer understanding of the topic. Important to this project is an inquiring attitude and providing useful and relevant information: this project will require students to consider several viewpoints without arguing for one, and to present information efficiently, in such a way that an audience can readily make use of it. Again, students will think about how a visual and/or oral component can help them accomplish their goals with their audience.

- **Analyzing place or artifact**—Students analyze a visual artifact, such as a piece of art on campus or a specific part of the ISU campus landscape—in order to help their audience come to a clear or fresh understanding of this place or art. Besides communicating why students want their audience to have this understanding, their project will examine all the elements of the object or place and how they work together to create and overall idea. Important to this project will be students' analysis of the "fit" of this place or artwork with the overall environment of ISU. This project uses both students' personal impressions as well as some research. Using visuals will be important to this project, and communicating orally about it with a small group or the whole class may be part of the project as well.

- **Composing visual communication**—Students summarize the highlights of their exploration and informational or analysis project by composing a form of visual communication—such as a brochure, newsletter, poster, or video.

- **Portfolio**—As a cumulative project, students will create an electronic portfolio that represents what they have learned in English 150. It will include samples of their work from the course with their reflections on them, focusing on how they have improved and how they arrived at those improvements, both on individual assignments (above) and as WOVE communicator overall.

English 250

Overview

The goals of English 250 are for students to develop skills in written, oral, visual, and electronic communication, as listed below. As a result, students should become not only a more perceptive consumer of information, but also a communicator better able to make effective decisions in their own academic life and work. A central concept in this course is stated in your *Everything's an Argument* text: " . . . all language and symbols are in some way argumentative, pointing in a direction and asking for yet another response, whether it be understanding, identification, or

persuasion" (vii). In this course, students will summarize, analyze, and evaluate various types of communication and then use those skills in four kinds of assignments: summaries, rhetorical analyses (both textual and visual), exploratory/persuasive texts, and documented research.

Learning Objectives

Through readings, class discussions, and assignments, student will learn to:

Written

- Analyze professional writing to assess its purpose, audience, and rhetorical strategies
- Construct arguments that integrate logical, ethical, and emotional appeals
- Write source papers analyzing a rhetorical situation and identifying and accurately documenting appropriate source material
- Avoid distracting or confusing sentence-level errors
- Reflect systematically upon all of your communication processes, strengths, goals, and growth

Oral

- Give an oral presentation, either individually or as part of a team, using effective invention, organization, language, and delivery strategies
- Be an effective team member in small groups as a contributor, listener, and presenter

Visual

- Rhetorically analyze visual communication, such as an advertisement, film, etc.
- Create a visual argument (i.e., advertisement, bookmark, poster, slide presentation)

Electronic

- Rhetorically analyze electronic communication, such as emails or websites
- Create an electronic composition (e.g., communication eportfolio)

Assignments

The projects students work in during the course include the following:

- **Summary**—Students learn how to identify main ideas and recast those ideas in their own words. Active reading skills will help them notice how writers express, organize, and support their points. Students learn to translate others' ideas accurately and to treat those ideas with respect.
- **Rhetorical analysis**—Students analyze readings and visual communication to see how— and how successfully—the author uses substance, organization, style, and delivery to fit the particular context of purpose and audience. Learning to analyze rhetorically will allow students to become adept at noticing how an author accomplishes his/her purpose. This skill will help students plan their own communication efforts.
- **Argument and persuasion**—Academic *argument* takes a position on an issue using reasoned claims, documented research, verifiable evidence, and an open-minded approach. *Persuasion*, on the other hand, tries to achieve direct action or behavioral change by using emotional appeals and focusing more on one side of an issue. Students explore argument and persuasion by analyzing various texts— essays, editorials, advertising, websites, films.

Students then apply this knowledge as you construct their own arguments. For example, students might compose a rebuttal to one or more of the readings, an oral presentation recommending changes on campus, or a slide presentation arguing their position on a controversial topic.

- **Documented research**—As students develop their own arguments, they will learn to support their ideas by interweaving sources into their projects. In English 250, students will gain experience with basic research methods, standard documentation forms, and the appropriate uses of summary, paraphrase, and direct quotation—all of which will enhance the integrity of their writing. In addition to a written text, their instructor might ask them to share their research with their classmates through a poster or a slide presentation.
- **Portfolio**—As a cumulative project, students create an electronic portfolio that shows either their growth (developmental portfolio) or best work (showcase portfolio).

English 302

Overview

During this semester, students will work individually and with their classmates to address and solve several communication problems typically encountered by professionals. By the end of the term, students should have developed the communication skills to excel at creating and delivering successful documents in their chosen field, in part by analyzing their reader's existing knowledge base, resulting needs, and his or her attitudes and values as they reside in the existing communication context.

Learning Objectives

Through readings, class discussions, and assignments, student will learn to:

- Apply rhetorical principles to business communication.
- Implement principles of effective document design and the display of quantitative data.
- Understand the influences of organizational settings in the composition of business documents.
- Understand the conventions of the student's discipline and be aware of the variety of conventions across disciplines.
- Participate in the collaborative planning and executing of a project.
- Understand how ethical issues influence research and application in the student's discipline.

Assignments

The projects students work in during the course include the following:

- **Memo exploring workplace communication**—describe a type of workplace communication to a specific group of readers: students in their major who are about to enter the workplace in their profession. The memo help explain to understand a common type of business document that they are likely to encounter in the workplace.
- **Message Packet**—Students write a series of messages based on a scenario. Students write a variety of messages—positive, negative, request, information, etc.—to different audiences.
- **Topic Proposal**—Students write a topic proposal for their recommendation report.
- **Progress Report**—Students give an oral report on the progress of the recommendation project.
- **Recommendation Report**—Students write a formal recommendation report.
- **Presentation**—Students give a formal presentation on the recommendation report

English 309

Overview

During this semester, students work individually and with classmates to develop proposals for business, governmental, nonprofit, or other organizations and to report on the work completed both orally and in writing. This course uses problems, cases, and peer-to-peer learning to help enforce course content. Additionally, while professional communication must become a finalized product for delivery to an audience, it also must integrate a development process for making those products more effective. This course uses brainstorming, drafting, critiquing, and reflecting to benefit professional communication production. Lastly, rhetoric, persuading and identifying with an audience, explains the difference between effective and ineffective professional communication, so this course employs basic rhetorical theory to help explain this difference, including terms like rhetorical situation, rhetorical techniques, audience-awareness, and genre.

Learning Objectives

Through readings, class discussions, and assignments, you will learn to:

- Apply rhetorical principles to grant, proposal, and report writing.
- Understand the generic and conventional requirements of grants, proposals, and reports.
- Implement principles of effective document design and the display of quantitative data for grants, proposals, and reports.
- Understand the influences of organizational settings in the composition of grants, proposals, and reports.
- Understand research strategies for finding funding sources.
- Understand collaborative planning and executing of grant, proposal, and reports project.
- Understand how ethical issues influence research and application in your discipline.

Assignments

The projects students work in during the course include the following:

- **Editor's lesson**—Students present a portion of the Chicago Manual of Style, or similar book from their discipline, on an editorial concept. Students develop content and practice modules to teach that concept.

- **Proposal analysis**—Students compose a genre analysis of a proposal to demonstrate their understanding of the proposal genre.

- **Consulting proposal**—Students compose a consulting proposal in response to a case study to demonstrate their understanding of proposals and to practice foundational proposal argumentation.

- **Grant package**—Students compose a grant package to gain funding for research or service. The package has five major components: (1) a letter of inquiry to clients; (2) worksheets and drafts; (3) the letter of intent to funders; (4) the proposal itself and (5) a letter soliciting support from partner organizations or colleagues.

- **Presentation**—Students compose a final presentation of the grant package to their client using automated and narration techniques with slide software.

English 314

Overview

During this semester, students work individually and with classmates to address and solve several communication problems typically encountered by professionals. By the end of the term, students should have developed the communication skills to excel at creating and delivering successful documents in their chosen field, in part by analyzing their readers' existing knowledge base, resulting needs, and his or her attitudes and values as they reside in the existing communication context.

Learning Objectives

Through readings, class discussions, and assignments, students will learn to:

- Apply rhetorical principles to technical communication.

- Implement principles of effective document design and the display of quantitative data.

- Understand the influences of organizational settings in the composition of technical and professional documents.

- Understand the conventions of your discipline and be aware of the variety of conventions across disciplines.

- Participate in the collaborative planning and executing of a project.

- Understand how ethical issues influence research and application in your discipline.

Assignments

The projects students work in during the course include the following:

- **Memo exploring workplace communication**—Students describe a type of workplace communication to a specific group of readers: students in their major who are about to enter the workplace in their profession. The memo help explain to understand a common type of business document that they are likely to encounter in the workplace.

- **Problem Statement**—Students synthesize research to establish a problem that a technical description will help to solve.

- **Topic Proposal**—Students write a topic proposal for a technical description. Proposals are ranked blindly by students and only the top 50% are accepted for development.

- **Instructions**—Student write a set of technical instructions.

- **Feasibility Report**—Students test a set of instructions and write a report.

- **Technical Description**—Students create a description of a process or a mechanism.

- **Progress Report**—Students give an oral report of the progress of their technical description.

- **Presentation**—Students present the process of creating the technical description and its recommendations.

Best Practices

Encourage faculty involvement

Look for ways of **integrating topics and discussions**. These topics can come from controversial topics in your discipline or current politics—something students can connect to from coursework in your department and the world at large.

Invite faculty members to sit in on your Department's English course and ask the English instructor to sit in on classes the LC students take. When students see their discipline faculty interact with their English instructor, the importance of communication is reinforced.

Offer to create opportunities for students to **practice the type of communication** they will need for their major areas. Are there ways to connect the content of the English course to activities your students will be doing in their Learning Community activities of their discipline coursework? Past examples include:

> Students in the Microbiology LC tested water samples collected by the Skunk River Navy and wrote a lab report. The LC Coordinator arranged the lab, coordinates lab assistants, and runs the lab.

> Horticulture LC students researched questions coming from their Horticulture classes and presented their research in a poster session for the entire Department of Horticulture during its final weekly seminar of the semester.

> Agricultural Business LC link between Economics 235 (marketing) and English 250 required all students in both classes keep market reports on a commodity of their choice and create bi-monthly reports to share with their class.

When students are asked to write about a topic in their discipline, your faculty can read and **comment on the *content*** of student papers. Your faculty can ask questions in the margins to get students thinking more deeply about their topics or suggest a foundational text that students may have missed. Your English instructor will be reviewing the papers for organization, style, and mechanics, but would greatly appreciate your view on the discipline content. You and your faculty are the discipline experts.

Major area faculty could prepare **lectures/activities** on communication topics for the English course. Every discipline has different expectations for communication—maybe you or your faculty could share what it's like to communicate in your discipline?

Organize a shared or common reading

Develop a **common reading** program between the LC and the English link.

Involve a subject librarian

Invite your field's **subject librarian** to provide a lecture and activity on locating sources.

Promote communication excellence

Perhaps your English instructor could help develop a small communication assignment for your courses to connect or reinforce the content of the English link.