

To: 2600 Students
From: Ann Brady
Re: Workplace professionals and writing/designing at work

Following are instructions for your second writing assignment in which you investigate the writing habits of workplace professionals.

1. Identify a professional in the workplace, someone, perhaps, who works in a position you'd like to fill. Preferably, your professional will be someone who writes or designs (websites, for instance) in technical and/or scientific communication. However, a professional could also be an attorney, an engineer, a secretary, an advertising or marketing writer, an accountant, a business owner, anyone who communicates in order to get things done.
2. Ask him or her a set of focused questions that will help you understand who writes or designs in the workplace, how often, and why. I've included a sample list below. You can use to generate your own questions, use a mix of your own and some of these, or use them verbatim.
3. Transcribe your interview.
4. Synthesize your findings and report them in a memo that uses professional writing style and design (memo) that is tailored to the needs of your audience.

Sample questions:

1. What is your position and how long have you held it?
2. How much time do you spend writing?
3. What kinds of writing do you do?
4. How much time do you spend designing?
5. What kinds of design do you do?
6. Do you plan how your written documents will "look," how you can use formats, fonts, and white space to make them more accessible to readers?
7. How important is your writing and/or designing to the successful performance of your job?
8. Who are your audiences? How important are they to your writing or designing?
9. Do you write/design alone or collaboratively? Is one approach more productive than another for you?
10. What's the major problem you see in workplace writing? What about designing?
11. What are the features that you look for in someone else's writing or design work?
12. What advice would you give to someone preparing to write and/or design in the workplace?
13. What differences, if any, do you see between professional writing and the writing you did in high school or college?

Should you have questions, you can reach me at mabrady@mtu.edu.