

Dear Registered Online English 135 Students,

Welcome to English 135, Business and Technical Writing and Research! My name is Betsy Cohn (feel free to address me as "Betsy" or "Ms. Cohn"), and I'll be your instructor. I am pleased that you are able to join me in this 95% online version of the course. Please read this letter carefully. I realize that it is long, but it contains information you need to get off to a good start in the course. In addition to providing you with some course background and listing the required materials, it gives instructions for accessing the class web site (available on the first day of classes).

COURSE BACKGROUND: AN INVITATION TO LEARN

English 135 is designed to help students understand and develop effective workplace communication skills. As some of you may know, communication skills are highly prized by employers, yet those same employers often despair over their employees' writing weaknesses. For example, in a *New York Times* article titled "What Corporate America Can't Build: A Sentence," Sam Dillon notes, "Millions of employees must write more frequently on the job than previously. And many are making a hash of it." The article proceeds to identify a range of negative consequences (including frustrating colleagues and exposing employers to profit losses, lawsuits or other legal actions). Virtually all jobs (especially those with the potential for advancement) involve significant writing, and many desperate employers are forcing their workers to get remedial training.

As graduates of English 135, you all will offer those employers valuable skills. Together, we will learn how to analyze various readers and purposes for writing and how to use that analysis to choose the most effective writing format, tone, and style. We'll also work on expressing ideas efficiently and accurately. By the end of the semester, you will possess analytical and communication skills that will have long-term professional payoffs.

I am truly excited about helping you, but I should also note that achieving those gains will require hard work and a steady, strong commitment to the course and to each other. Together, we seek to create a community of learners or "writers in training," where peer and instructor support will be integral to mastering professional communication skills. Once the semester starts, we will communicate with each other within the UCompass course management system that hosts our class web site; we will use UCompass' email and Discussion Board to collaborate, even in the absence of face-to-face contact.

[Put time aside each week, just as you would if you were attending classes on campus, to "attend" this online course and complete the necessary work.](#) (A good rule of thumb is that a three-hour college-level class such as English 135 will require on average about nine hours per week of quality time for reading, writing, studying, and discussing course content.) Online reading and writing assignments and other exercises will be carefully timed and sequenced. I promise to provide ample guidance and frequent feedback to help ensure your gradual buildup of skills. In return, you'll each need to commit to accessing the class web site several times each week and to meeting deadlines. I hope that you see how much you have to gain by engaging fully in the course. I also hope that you'll ask questions about the course and make suggestions for improving learning in the course throughout the semester.

Taking English 135 online has several advantages over the traditional face-to-face format. Perhaps most obviously, it gives students with difficult schedules greater flexibility. Also, because the course materials and correspondence will be captured in writing and available online throughout the semester, you will be able to delve more deeply into the course materials, lingering over concepts that you find most difficult or intriguing. Finally, you will strengthen computer skills that are especially useful in the workplace and will likely improve your reading and organizational skills. These skills, of course, will continue to benefit you in future jobs and courses.

MATERIALS AND COMPUTER/SOFTWARE REQUIREMENTS

Your first question is likely to be what books to buy. The following textbook is required and available at HFCC's bookstore: *Technical Communication: A Reader-Centered Approach*, 7th edition, by Paul Anderson. (Caution: some other sections of English 135 use a different textbook. Be sure to get the correct one!) Your reading assignments will start right away, so get the textbook by the first day of classes.

You should also have a [college-level dictionary](#) (such as *Webster's Collegiate*) and a [style/grammar handbook](#) (such as *Raimes' Keys for Writers*, *Hacker's A Pocket Style Manual* or *Fulwiler and Hayakawa's The College Writer's Reference*). If you didn't keep one from English 131, the bookstore will have plenty to choose from!

When registering for this section, you were probably aware of the implications of taking the course online, but let me highlight a few critical points and requirements.

As an online student in English 135, you must have consistent, reliable access to a [computer with Internet access](#). We will use a class Web site that I set up in HFCC's UCompass Educator course management system. While advanced computer skills are not required, you should be comfortable using email and navigating the Internet, and you should have basic word processing and file management skills. If you have concerns about these technical requirements, please notify me. My contact information is given below.

You must use **Microsoft WORD** (*not* Works or WordPerfect) as your word processing software. Why Microsoft Word? You will find that workplace writing involves some fairly complicated formatting that more simplistic word processing programs (such as Works) can't handle very well; when dealing with that formatting, I'll provide instructions for using MS Word. Also, we will be sharing documents electronically; using the same software will ensure that we don't have trouble opening and reading each other's files. Moreover, Word is the program used most often in the workplace, making it especially appropriate for this course in professional communication.

Finally, let me list some requirements for viewing or listening to materials that I'll post online:

1. Many of the documents that I post will be in PDF format. You will need [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#) loaded on your computer to view them.
2. I will include some audio files to listen to, so you'll need a computer with speakers or headphones and with the [Windows Media Player](#) or equivalent.
3. I'll also be asking you to view and listen to some narrated PowerPoint presentations. For them, you'll need to have the most recent version of the [Java player](#).
4. Other presentations that I post will require you to have the up-to-date [Flash player](#).

If you don't have Java, Flash, Acrobat Reader or the Windows Media Player, you can access and download them for free by going to the UCompass site (<http://henryford.ucompass.com>) and clicking on "Required Technology," which will have the links you need to access these products' sites. If you have problems with any of these downloads, please contact HFCC's Instructional Technology Department at 313-845-9663.

ACCESSING AND NAVIGATING THE COURSE SITE

The URL to access the course is <http://henryford.ucompass.com>. Note the links on the left-hand side of the log-in page; please review these links (especially "Is online for you?," "Required Technology," "Tips for Success," "Login Information" and "Tech Support") right away.

By now, I hope that you are eager to access our English 135 course site! While I appreciate your eagerness, I'm afraid that you'll need to wait until the first day of classes. As early as possible on that day, go to <http://henryford.ucompass.com>, and follow directions on the "Login Information" page on UCompass' site; troubleshooting information is provided at the bottom of that page.

When you enter the course site for the first time, read the "welcome" announcement and access its links. Then explore the rest of the course site by clicking on the buttons on the left-hand side of the screen. Also, get into the habit of checking for new announcements and email every time you log in (several days per week). Throughout the semester, the area that you'll access most frequently is "Course Materials." Under "Packets," I will post weekly goals and directions for textbook and online readings and other assignments.

THINGS TO DO

So that I can be sure that you're getting off to a good start, please do the following:

1. Send me an email (see my address below) that reassures me that you've read this letter and that tells me when you took English 131, who your instructor was, and whether you got at least a C- (the requirement for enrolling in English 135).
2. By midnight on the first day of classes, be sure that you've logged in to the course site, read the announcement, viewed the orientation presentations, and accessed and read the assignments for week 1.
3. Plan to meet your first writing deadline given in the week 1 assignments document.

CONCLUSION

One final question you might have is why the course is listed as only 95% on line. We will have some face-to-face meetings: a final exam at the end of the semester and one or two mid-semester meetings (whose times will be determined later--I'll do my best to accommodate your scheduling needs). I'd also love to meet with you in person at the beginning of the semester. Especially if you're nervous about the online learning format, if you have special needs that I should know about, or if you'd like to review the course site's setup together, plan to stop by my office. I'll be available in my office (Technology Building, room T-211-F) during office hours (which will be listed in the "Course Information" packet under "Course Materials" in UCompass). If those times don't work for you, call or email me so that we can schedule something else.

You should now have the information you need to get started. If you need help or have questions, please let me know (phone: 313-845-9886; campus email: bcohn@hfcc.edu; UCompass email: bcohn@henryford.ucompass.com). I look forward to knowing and working with you.

Sincere best wishes for a successful semester,

Betsy Cohn