

# Applied Learning in an Editing and Writing for Publication Course

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**Abstract** At a small liberal arts college, one TPC course was created that combined editing, writing for publication, and applied learning opportunities. The course was created to meet departmental goals for adding a writing course and adding a course students would be interested in taking. The course includes having students participate in two large-scale editing projects including a project where they work directly with clients. In the publishing section of the course, students have opportunities to write for a variety of options including digital options, college newspaper, and undergraduate journal options.

**Keywords** editing, publication, academic publishing, applied learning, client involvement

**A**s a newly hired professor in an English department at a small liberal arts college, I was the first technical and professional communication (TPC) hire in over a decade and was faced with a curriculum that focused exclusively on literature with only the freshman writing sequence focused on writing. One of the main focuses of my new job was to create a few classes in the English department that would be writing-focused. In the various discussions that occurred during my first semester, the focus was on what classes could be added that would be writing-focused but also interesting enough so that students would take the course. These concerns were valid, and I spent most of that semester thinking about how to balance my desires for TPC courses with the desires of the rest of the department. Most of the English faculty agreed that an editing class would be a good first class to be added but were concerned that not enough students would be interested in just a class on editing. I proposed that adding a writing for publication component to an editing class might be an option for increasing student interest as well as adding real-world application assignments. While I knew that most universities have separate classes in editing and in publication, due to the context of our college, combining these two classes into one class made the most sense. With department approval, I created an upper-division undergraduate class titled *Editing and Writing for Publication*.

The course is offered every third semester, and, while it is usually offered as an in-person class, it has also been offered in asynchronous and synchronous online formats. The course has proven to be popular with students and usually has one of the highest enrollments for upper division English courses.

## **Designing the Course**

With the approval of the department, I set about creating this course and spent time in planning on how to cover so many different topics while still providing students with real-world opportunities. I started with researching what other colleges were offering for classes and researching the literature on the content and creation of such classes.

As this article is focused mainly on the course I created, the literature review is focused mainly on the pedagogical influences on course creation. I found that editing courses are one of the most common courses in TPC programs (Melonçon, 2019). Courses that focus on publishing are also common. Much less common are courses that focus on both ideas (Baker, Rawlins, & Pierson, 2024).

Even though editing courses are common in TPC programs, as is research on the pedagogy and curriculum of such courses, there is less research on specific types of editing (Bisaillon, 2007). Suzan Flanagan (2019) points out the lack of empirical research on technical editing and the lack of cohesive pedagogy for teaching technical editing. Joanna Schreiber recently reviewed editing courses and the teaching of inclusive editing (2025), and she found some research on ways to include accessibility and inclusive language in such classes, there is still a need to add more inclusive editing strategies.

As I was creating this class, I knew that I wanted to include a client-based editing project and that students would need to learn how to work with clients (Cummings, 2007; Kirkscey & Aataluri, 2022; Van Patten, 2015). To help students understand more about working with clients, I included mock-interviews (Ryan, 2008). I also use the textbook, *Explanation Points*, as several of the chapters specifically focus on editing and meeting with clients for conducting editing projects (Gallagher & DeVoss, 2019).

In creating the writing for publication part of the course, I found the majority of research was with graduate students and focused more on math, science, and social science courses. The research on undergraduate writing for publication classes mainly focused on creative writing opportunities with less focus on other types of publications. The few articles I did find, emphasized real-world applications and encouraged students to submit their writing for publication opportunities (Baker et al., 2024; Russell, 2024; Weiner &

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Watkinson, 2014). Benefits of encouraging undergraduate students to engage in real-world writing applications include having students have more motivation to improve their writing skills, increase critical thinking skills, and develop mentoring relationships with professors (Bresse & Kinkead, 2022; Burns & Ware, 2008; Ishyama, 2002; Jensen, 2024; Kinkead, 2021; Vengadasalam, 2020).

Many of my students are intimidated by the publishing process and often think that only the best writers are the ones that get published. I emphasize in this class that everyone has the opportunity to be published in both traditional and non-traditional mediums. Students appreciate being able to write for the college newspaper and include their essays in the undergraduate journal. In addition to these traditional mediums, students spend time researching online publishing opportunities including *Medium* and *Buzzfeed* (Cummings, 2021; Vengadasalam, 2020).

### **Course Goals**

*Editing and Writing for Publication* has course goals focused on having students gain editing skills and have opportunities to work directly with clients on editing projects. Course goals also included having students identify specific publication opportunities including both print and online options.

At the end of the course, I wanted students to have had the following real-world experiences (as listed on the course syllabus):

- Edit a client-driven writing project
- Edit for the college undergraduate journal
- Write a newspaper article to be submitted to the college newspaper
- Write an article for online publication (i.e. *Medium*, *Buzzfeed*, online magazine, etc)
- Create a digital poster to present at the undergraduate research conference
- Submit an essay to our college undergraduate journal or submit an essay to an undergraduate research journal of your choosing

### **Course Organization**

The course focuses on editing skills for eight weeks and then focuses on publication opportunities for eight weeks. At first glance, this course seems as if it would be divided into two different sections without a connection between them. However, there is a strong connection between these two sections as the editing skills students develop in the first eight weeks continue to be used throughout the second eight weeks, and the final project

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for the course has students both be student editors of our academic journal as well as publish an article in the journal.

The course has two main books and a variety of Open Education Resource (OER) and digital readings.

- Einsohn, Amy & Schwartz, Marilyn. (2019). *The copyeditor's handbook: A guide for book publishing and corporate communications*. University of California Press.
- Gallagher, John R. & DeVoss, Dànielle Nicole (Eds.). (2019). *Explanation points: Publishing in rhetoric and composition*. University Press of Colorado.

The first half of the course is focused on topics related to editing and how to work with clients on client editing projects. Within these weeks, students learn skills in line editing, developmental editing, copyediting, content editing, track changes in Google Docs and Microsoft Word. The second half of the course focuses on publication options including newspaper writing, online publication, research poster, and publishing in an academic journal.

The major assignments for the course and the weeks the assignments cover are as follows:

- Editing-based assignments (Weeks 1–3)
- Mock interviews with clients (Weeks 3–4)
- Meetings with clients (Weeks 5–8)
- Report on editing experience with client project (Week 8)
- Creative writing options (Week 9)
- Newspaper writing (Weeks 9–10)
- Online writing options: *Medium*, *Buzzfeed*, magazine (Weeks 10–11)
- Poster creation for undergraduate conference (Weeks 12–13)
- Prepare student essay for submission to journal (Weeks 12–13)
- Edit and format undergraduate journal submissions (Weeks 14–15)
- Publish undergraduate journal (Week 16)

By the end of the semester, students will have participated in two large-scale editing projects where they have an opportunity to work with an actual client as well as provide academic editing. There is an undergraduate academic research journal (*Belmont Capstones and Letters Journal*) connected with the college and the final project in the course is for students to edit the essays that have been submitted to the journal by other students as well as to format the essays to fit the journal style. Students are guaranteed two publishing experiences with submitting an essay to the undergraduate journal and

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being published in the school newspaper. There are other opportunities for publication within the course, but those are not guaranteed options. Students also create a research poster that they present at a college undergraduate research conference. By the end of the semester, students have completed several real-world-based projects that provide them with experience to add to their resumes and LinkedIn profiles. The class is focused on applied learning and providing opportunities for students to use the skills they are being taught for both editing and publication.

### **Course Revisions**

This course has undergone many changes and revisions as various assignments have been added or deleted. Some assignments are a better fit for the in-person version than the online version, and so assignments are changed depending on the medium. I have also asked students to reflect on their experiences in the class and to provide feedback on each assignment, and then I revise the class based on that feedback.

When I teach the course as either an asynchronous or synchronous online course, I usually do not include the mock interviews or direct contact with the client wanting editing help, as I find that these two assignments are difficult to navigate through online spaces. The first time I taught the class online, I had students meet with their clients on Zoom, and I found that this did not work out very well, as both clients and students were not familiar with Zoom, and there seemed to be a lot of miscommunication issues. For these reasons, with my online courses, I have clients communicate directly with me, and then I send the necessary information to students. Students still complete client-based editing projects but do not communicate directly with the client. I find that my being the common connection helps these client projects to go more smoothly and for both the student and the client to feel that their needs and wants are being met.

The number of guest speakers who participate in the course has changed. The first semester I taught the course, I brought in ten different guest speakers to talk on various topics related to editing and publication. While the students and guest speakers really enjoyed the experience, I realized that this was an overwhelming amount of time to spend on guest speakers when the course itself had a lot of assignments and material to cover. I also found that it was hard to have guest speakers for the online version of the course as many of my contacts did not want to record themselves and post to the course. For the in-person or synchronous courses, I usually have three guest speakers during the semester, and they usually cover editing, creative writing, and a variety of other writing for publication topics. Three guest speakers has worked out much better.

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I have also tried several different assignments that I have since removed from the current version of the course. One such assignment was to write a review of a journal article and submit it for publication. To help prepare students to write a review of a journal article, I had them read reviews that professors in the English department had written for journals. I had thought this would be a good way for students to understand what a review includes and to have an opportunity to read something their professors had written. In retrospect, this was not a successful idea as most students felt intimidated by reading their professors' reviews and were unwilling to provide any kind of critical analysis of the reviews. The majority of the professor reviews were written on books that were focused on topics that few of my students were interested in. For this assignment, I had students read articles published in the undergraduate journal, *Queen City Writers*, and then write a review of any of the articles that they read. Several students did have their reviews published, but I found that most students were not very interested in writing a review and did not see how such an assignment would be helpful to them. For these reasons, I have deleted this assignment.

The largest revision I made was to the academic journal submission part of the class. The first two times I taught the class, I had students find undergraduate journals and submit one of their previously written articles to one. I would spend several weeks on this assignment helping students understand how to select a journal, read the submission requirements, and prepare their article for submission. Every semester, at least one student would have their article accepted for publication, but the rest of the class would get discouraged at either receiving a rejection email or never hearing back from the journal. While I tried to keep encouraging students to submit their essays to other potential venues, I felt there had to be a better way of having students engage in undergraduate research possibilities. I changed this assignment to the current version of students being editors and helping me publish our own academic journal.

### **Impact of Course**

The course was designed to provide many opportunities for applied learning in both editing and publication. On course evaluations, students include how much they appreciate the focus on applied and how many skills and practice experiences they gained from the course. Students gain experience with being freelance editors, and this is something they can add to their resumes and LinkedIn profiles.

Several writing-specific options on our college campus are sustained or created because of this course. The school newspaper has largely been able to be published based on the

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articles this course generates. Many of the students in the course write the required newspaper article and then join the newspaper class and continue to write for the school newspaper in subsequent semesters.

In encouraging students to find opportunities to be published in undergraduate research journals, I decided to create a journal for the college. The third volume is currently being created with the skills and time from students currently taking the course. The efforts and involvement of students are why we have the *Belmont Capstones and Letters Journal* and can continue to offer this experience to all students at the college. Students both submit their own essays to the journal and are also the student editors for the journal. They spend the last several weeks of the course in editing, formatting, and getting the journal ready for publication.

Learning about publication and having the experience of publishing their work has inspired several students to pursue other publication opportunities. A recent history major just published an essay focused on public history in *Queen City Writers* (Farris, 2024). Several other students have also been published in this journal, including Desislava Yordanova (2021), who wrote about her experiences being an immigrant to the United States. Another student chose to submit his senior capstone essay to a different undergraduate journal and was accepted for publication (Torres, 2021) in time to be helpful in his graduate school application.

## **Conclusion and Takeaways**

One of the takeaways from the course is that an editing and writing for publication course can be created and can be successful in providing students with opportunities to develop editing skills and writing for publication skills. While there are not many other combined courses, that should not be a deterrent to creating such a class. In creating this course, one of the main concerns was if the course would find enough interested students to be able to meet the registration requirements and be held. By combining both topics into one course, this course has always had the necessary enrollment numbers and usually exceeds those numbers.

Another takeaway from the course is that including real-world editing assignments has been beneficial to students and to other people. Over the last several years, various community members and graduate students have had help with their memoirs, dissertation chapters, nonprofit writings, and a variety of other writing projects. Students have gained freelance editing skills, and clients have gained editing help as well.

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Another takeaway from the course is that providing students with opportunities to be published has then helped students to become more interested in continuing to be involved in publication opportunities. The number of students who had their first newspaper article published after writing the article for the course and then went on to join the newspaper staff or the literary magazine staff or to find other opportunities for publication is high. The course helps students to gain confidence in their own writing abilities.

Creating a course with a balance of editing experiences, writing experiences, and real-world application experience involved a lot of research, time, and effort. The resulting course has been successful and has proven to provide students with experiences and opportunities in these areas.

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