MIT STUDENT WRITING AND SPEAKING SELF-ASSESSMENT

The MIT Communication Requirement stemmed partly from alumni feedback. MIT alumni consistently report that expertise in communication principles and practices—in other words, knowing how to write and speak clearly and compellingly in both formal and informal situations—is essential to their careers after MIT. A majority of MIT alumni report that they wish they had dedicated more of their own time and effort to learning how to argue effectively with evidence, how to write and speak with grace and style, and how to assess and provide for the needs of their various audiences.

As an undergraduate now in a CI subject, you have the opportunity to learn from their experience and to take charge of your own communication education, which begins by assessing your knowledge and abilities, and then setting specific goals for the semester. As you move through the communication requirement, you can keep adding new or more advanced goals, so that by the time you graduate, you will have learned how to write and speak as a professional in your field.

1. Name _____________________    Date _____Dec. 9, 2010_____

2. Your year:   First year  Sophomore  Junior  Senior    Your Course: ___undesignated___

3. Subject ___ESG 21W.732_____

4. Did you take the FEE?
   YES
   NO

   If "YES," please list any specific advice about your writing that you remember:

5. Is this the first CI subject you have taken at MIT?
   YES
   NO    If "NO," please list the other CI subject(s) you have taken:____________________________

CURRENT KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT: WRITING FOR DIFFERENT SITUATIONS AND PURPOSES

6. From the following statements, select all that are true for you.
   ___I have always enjoyed writing and seek opportunities to write for different purposes.
   ___I believe that writing helps me to develop stronger ideas and to explore complex issues in academic work.
   ___I have sufficient experience and knowledge about writing in this subject.
   ___I have no strong feelings about writing, neither seeking nor avoiding it.
   ___I find writing to be easy in some subjects and harder in others.
   ___I generally understand the principles for academic writing, but want to learn more about writing in this subject.
   ___I haven’t given much thought to writing in different situations; I just the write the same way in each subject.
   ___I have mostly avoided writing, and subjects that involve writing.
   ___I often feel unclear about the principles and purposes for writing in this subject, or in most subjects.

Adapted from the Writer’s Personal Profile developed by Tracy Ann Robinson for the Oregon State University Writing Intensive Curriculum Program. For more information about the tool and best practices for using it, please visit http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/assessment/robinson_burton.cfm.
7. Which kinds of writing are you most comfortable producing? (select as many as you like)

___ Personal writing (personal essays; first-person, factual narratives; journals, etc.)
___ Essay exams
___ Creative writing (fiction, poetry, etc)
___ Technical writing
___ Blogs
___ Factual reports
___ Lab reports
___ Literary analysis
___ Summaries or overviews of a reading or topic (literature reviews, annotated bibliographies, etc.)
___ Longer, synthetic arguments drawing on many sources
___ Proposals

8. What, specifically, do you consider strengths in your writing?

1. _________________________________________________________
2. _________________________________________________________
3. _________________________________________________________

CURRENT KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT: APPROACH TO DRAFTING AND REVISION

9. For each of the following aspects of the academic writing process, mark whether you consider your knowledge and abilities STRONG (S), WEAK (W), or NEUTRAL (N) in that area.

___ Choosing an appropriate and workable topic
___ Locating and evaluating sources
___ Analyzing sources in detail and deepening your own interpretations
___ Developing a focused, arguable thesis claim
___ Organizing the information and ideas, and structuring them in a logical sequence
___ Generating the first draft of your paper
___ Writing the introduction and/or conclusion
___ Sticking to the topic; identifying and omitting extraneous information
___ Moving beyond the surface or the obvious claims to a more rigorous argument
___ Creating smooth, logical transitions between paragraphs and sections
___ Incorporating and citing sources in your text
___ Revising your draft for logic, structure, and development after instructor, peer, and/or self review
___ Editing your draft for syntax, clarity, and professional presentation
___ Using an appropriate tone, writing style, and level of complexity for your target audience
___ Establishing and maintaining a writing schedule that gives you enough time to produce your best paper
10. In your academic studies (and/or other areas of your life), how often do you use informal writing as part of your thinking/learning process?

ALWAYS   FREQUENTLY   OCCASIONALLY   NEVER

11. What kinds of informal writing activities have you found helpful for clarifying your thoughts and integrating new information and concepts as you develop your ideas for a draft?

___ Summarizing ideas from lectures or readings
___ Writing out your own reflections and responses to readings or lecture material
___ Writing critical questions and exploratory answers about the material as you read
___ Writing definitions of key concepts in your own words
___ Keeping a general journal for recording thoughts and ideas
___ Free writing on the topic before you begin formal writing
___ Brainstorming notes in an informal outline, mind map, or cluster diagram
___ Writing a formal outline
___ Talking out your questions and ideas with a classmate or friend

12. Briefly describe your typical approach to writing a first draft (what do you do? How long do you spend on it?)

13. Briefly describe your typical approach to revising drafts of your writing.

14. What kind(s) of feedback from peers or instructors do you find most useful?

___ Comments on my use of evidence and understanding of the content
___ Comments on my thesis, original ideas, and insights about the material
___ Questions that ask me to clarify what I mean in specific passages
___ Questions that raise issues I hadn’t yet considered, or considered fully
___ Comments about the form or structure of my essay
___ Positive comments about what’s working well
___ Critiques of what’s not clear, accurate, or well-developed
___ Specific suggestions for further development
___ Editing marks on my syntax, grammar, and punctuation
CURRENT KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT: SPEAKING ABILITIES AND RHETORICAL KNOWLEDGE

15. With which of the following academic speaking forms do you feel comfortable:
   ___ Speaking actively and often in full-class discussion
   ___ Raising questions about materials or ideas in class
   ___ Speaking collaboratively in small groups to negotiate ideas and solve problems
   ___ Debating informally in class discussion when there are differences in interpretation
   ___ Debating formally with assigned or chosen positions
   ___ Presenting informally on a reading or topic
   ___ Presenting formally on your research
   ___ Providing feedback to other students on papers or presentations

16. From the following statements, select all that are true for you.
   ___ I have always enjoyed speaking in public and seek opportunities for public speaking.
   ___ I believe that articulating my ideas helps me to develop stronger ideas and to explore complex issues.
   ___ I have sufficient experience and knowledge about formal speaking in this subject.
   ___ When I speak, I consider my audience and purpose.
   ___ I have no strong feelings about speaking, neither seeking nor avoiding it.
   ___ I speak primarily to communicate ideas that I already understand.
   ___ I say what I think, whatever the audience.
   ___ I have never given formal speaking much thought.
   ___ I have mostly avoided public speaking, and don’t find it easy.
   ___ I often feel unclear about the principles and purposes for public speaking in this subject, or in most subjects.

SETTING PERSONAL WRITING AND SPEAKING GOALS FOR YOUR CI SUBJECT

Think about the kinds of writing and speaking you expect to do as a professional after graduation. Next, think about any gaps that exist between your current repertoire of writing and speaking skills and those needed by professionals in your field. To close these gaps, what needs to change about your writing and speaking?

The goals you choose should be rhetorically based, specific, and realistic (i.e., achievable). Thus, goals such as "ace this course" (not rhetoric-based), "get better at writing" (too general), and "produce grammatically flawless first drafts" (probably not realistic) are inappropriate for this exercise. List your goals here:

Writing:
1._____________________________________________________________________________________
2._____________________________________________________________________________________

Speaking:
1._____________________________________________________________________________________
2._____________________________________________________________________________________